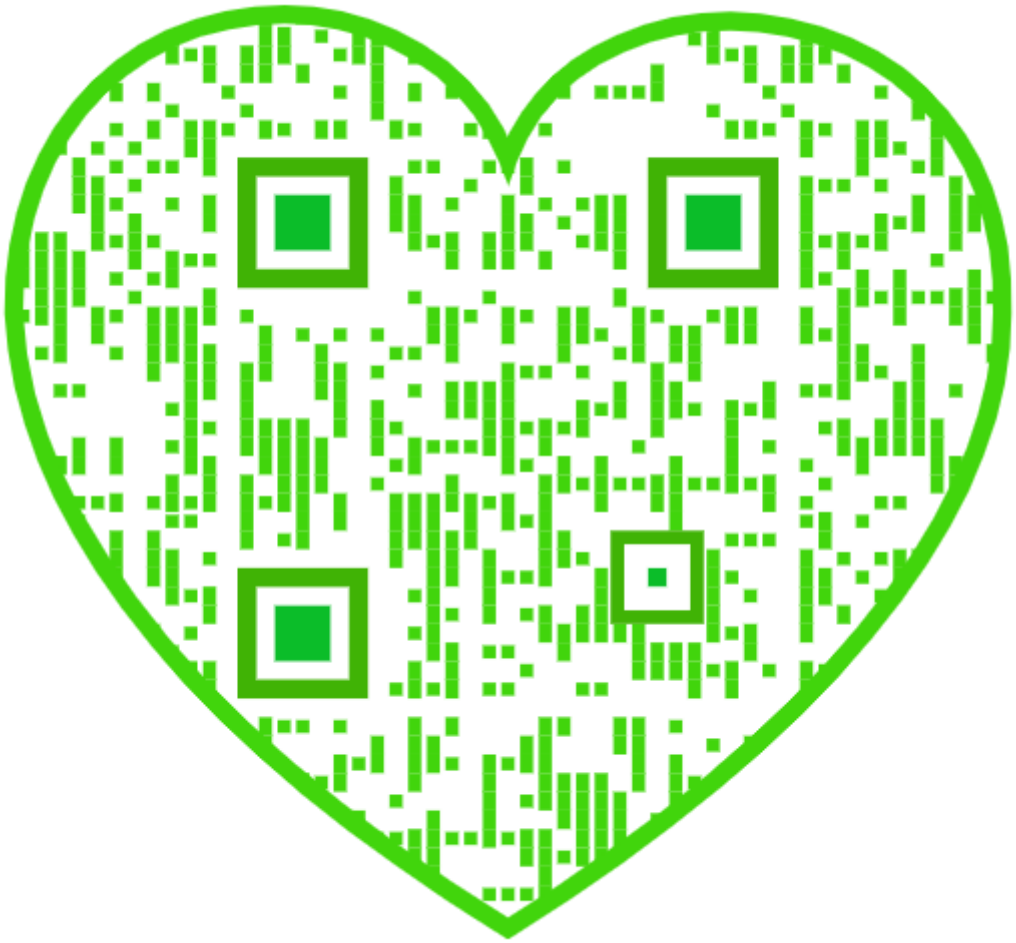

# MISCELLANEOUS ESSAYS

ON

# CHRISTIAN MORALS

F7

# MISCELLANEOUS ESSAYS

1993

ON

# CHRISTIAN MORALS;

## EXPERIMENTAL AND PRACTICAL.

Originally delivered as Lectures in the Broadmead Chapel, Bristol, England.

BY

JOHN FOSTER,

AUTHOR OF THE ESSAYS ON DECISION OF CHARACTER, AND POPULAR IGNORANCE.

"If the language of sermons be vague and general; if it do not apply clearly and directly to our own times, our own ways of life, and habits of thought and action, men elude its hold upon their consciences with a wonderful dexterity."—ARNOLD.

NEW-YORK:
D. APPLETON & CO. 200 BROADWAY.

PHILADELPHIA:
GEORGE S. APPLETON, 146 CHESNUT-ST.

MDCCCXLIV.

gift
Taiyuan Presb. Miss.
1-22-1933

# PREFACE.

In the year 1822, Mr. Foster, in compliance with the earnest request of some intimate friends, commenced the delivery of the lectures from which the following are selected, and continued them till the close of 1825. His auditory consisted of persons belonging to various religious communities in Bristol, most of whom had long known and appreciated his writings. With such a class of hearers, Mr. Foster felt himself warranted to take a wide range of subjects, and to adopt a varied and elaborate style of illustration. All the leading ideas of each discourse were committed to paper, with occasional hints for amplification, filling generally twelve or fourteen quarto pages.

Though it is to be regretted that the volume was not prepared for the press by Mr. Foster, yet the above statement will show that its contents are far from being hasty sketches or meagre outlines.—What these invaluable memorials of his revered friend might have been, after being subjected to the Author's revision, the Editor has in some mea-

sure been able to ascertain from comparing the original manuscript of a lecture on Hebrews xi. 6, with the same as published by the Religious Tract Society under the title, "How to find access to God." The bulk of the paragraphs are nearly identical, and the additional matter is chiefly by way of amplification.

The present volume has been printed from copies of the lectures which have been carefully collated with the original manuscripts. The Editor's chief attention has been directed to arranging the sentences in paragraphs, with the appropriate punctuation. It has also been found necessary to supply here and there a word or two, or a connective particle, such as in many instances must have been used in the delivery; but which for brevity's sake in writing were omitted.

J. E. RYLAND.

*Northampton, April* 8, 1844.

# CONTENTS.


Page

I.—The New Year.....9

II.—Spring, and its Moral Analogies.....18

III.—Autumn, and its Moral Analogies.....28

IV.—Winter, and its Moral Analogies..... .....39

V.—Supreme Attachment due to Spiritual Objects.....47

VI.—Spiritual Freedom produced by knowledge of the Truth....55

VII.—Christ, though invisible, the Object of Devout Affection.63

VIII.—Fallacies operating against Earnestness in Religion..... 73

IX.—Earnestness in Religion Enforced.....82

X.—Comprehensiveness of the Divine Law.....92

XI.—Self-Discipline suitable to certain Mental States.....100

XII.—Characteristics of Vain Thoughts.....110

XIII.—Correctives of Vain Thoughts.....118

XIV.—Necessity and Right Method of Self-Examination .....127

XV.—Uses and Perversions of Conscience.....136

XVI.—Formality and Remissness in Prayer.....145

XVII.—Watchfulness and Prayer.....154

XVIII.—Sober-Mindedness.....161

XIX.—False Grounds of Superiority in Holiness.....173

XX.—Right Mode of Giving and Receiving Reproof.....185

XXI.—Noah and the Deluge.....195

XXII.—Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.....206

XXIII.—Elijah's Sacrifice, and the Priests of Baal.....216

XXIV.—Ignorance of our Future Mode of Existence.....226

XXV.—Christian Doctrine of the Perfectibility of Man.....236

XXVI.—End of the Year.....245

# ESSAYS.

## I.

### THE NEW YEAR.

"*Better is the end of a thing than the beginning.*"—Lest this should seem rather a strange sentence to be taken as the foundation of a religious discourse, it may be proper to say, that the intended application of it is to the particular season to which the course of nature and the care of divine Providence have brought us,—*the beginning of another year.*

At the same time, this sentence should be true of many things that might be specified; and it will, if those things succeed well. For instance:—any train of serious thoughts and exercises in the mind, having a reference to practical good, and beginning on one suggestion, one conviction, but at last attaining the ultimate effect, or result; .... a course of inquiry concerning any important truth; the beginning is ignorance, doubt, anxiety, dread of the labour, misty and dubious twilight, and daybreak; but the end, knowledge, certainty, satisfaction, &c.; ... any practical undertaking for social good, as the present one; .... Christian profession; examples of the contrary are justly accounted among the most melancholy sights on earth; .... life itself; in the beginning are the charms of infancy; but the end, may be far better;—as in the case of a withered, trembling, sinking old man, whose soul is ripe for eternity;—and it should be so, and must be so, or life is an awful calamity!

The text expresses the general principle or doctrine, that by the condition of our existence here, if things go right, a conclusion is better than a beginning. It is in the condition of our existence in this world, that this principle is founded. That condition is, that every thing is passing on toward something else, in order to

and for the sake of that something further on; so that its chief importance or value is in that something to be attained further on. Childhood is regarded in relation to manhood; in that view its importance is estimated. But in the view of true wisdom, this more advanced stage itself is considered in reference to a final maturity for another state. So, in all our progressive schemes, measures, exercises, pursuits—where is the main point of the interest? In something beyond them. Thus what we are, what we have, or effect, or attain, is still relative to something further on. And if that ulterior object be attained, and be worth all this preceding course of things, then' "the end is better than the beginning." This is the doctrine of the text;—"the end," when it is the accomplishment of the desirable purpose, "is better than the beginning." The fruit is better than the blossom:—the reaping is better than the sowing;—the enjoyment than the reaping:—the second stage of a journey to the happy home is better than the first;—the home itself than all:—the victory is better than the march and the battle:—the reward is better than the course of service:—the ending in the highest improvement of means is better than being put at first in possession of them. In all this we see it is conditionally, and not absolutely, that "the end is better than the beginning."

To come now to our intended subject, *the new year*. We have to consider it on the supposition of our living through it. And it is most exceedingly desirable that in the noblest sense, "the end" should be "better than the beginning." We may previously suggest, that in some respects, independently of our will, the end may be worse than the beginning, and in all probability will be so with some of us. It may be, that before the end of the year, the Sovereign Disposer will have withdrawn or diminished some of our means and advantages for turning it to account;—that some of our associates and helpers will be taken away;—that our health and vigour will be diminished. As to those who are feeling the infirmities of declining life, it may

be accounted certain that a year will sensibly increase these evils. If, notwithstanding any thing that shall be thus experienced, it shall nevertheless be true at the end of the year that "better is the end of a thing than the beginning," it will be a delightful thing.

Now let us consider in a short series of plain particulars, what state of the case would authorize us at the end of the year to pronounce this sentence upon it.

And in the first place, it will easily occur as a general rule of judgment on the matter, that the sentence may be pronounced if, at the end of the year, we shall be able, after deliberate conscientious reflection, to affirm that the year has been in the most important respects, better than the preceding. It is possible to a reflective spirit to recall several preceding years, as the countenances of several departed acquaintance, to compare and estimate them one with another. This has sometimes been one of the serious employments of thought of persons sensible of their approaching end—to see how the evil or the good influences have acted on them; where has been the most cause for self-abasement, and where for gratitude. And well may we take the rules by which they have judged, while we review and compare, for instance, the last two years of our life. We *can* make some judgment of these last two in comparison,—and what is the sentence? Is it,—"The latter has been more of what in my best moments I have wished?"—"it has not left me where I was before?"—"through the divine grace I do stand on a somewhat different ground towards my God and my fellow-mortals?"—"my conscience and I are somewhat more at peace?"—"it is not quite so painful a review?"—"I can deplore that the former was not like the latter?"—"a devout friend solicitous for my welfare, who died in the former year, would have left me with more complacency in the latter? I have almost ventured to hope that that affectionate saint might in heaven itself be apprized of my improvement?"—Let us not shrink from so salutary an exercise of review and comparison. Now if, at the end of

the year, on repeating such an exercise we shall be able to pronounce such a judgment, then, "Better is the end of a thing than the beginning."

This leads to another observation. The sentence will be true if, during the progress of the year, we shall effectually avail ourselves of the lessons suggested by a review of the preceding year. What those lessons are, is the concern of each one's conscience in the sight of God. If there be persons to whom the lessons so derived are little more than simply this, "*Just persevere!*" —how happy! But to most of us there will be more accusing and painful ones; the purport of them may be, "REFORM!" If the solemn reflections which arose at the end of former years, have not had their due weight during the last, what an emphatic lesson they become now!—gathering aggravation through all the last year! and now at the end of it, and in the review, are there decided censures of the judgment, enforced by strong remonstrances of conscience? Is there something which we should dread to think should remain just the same for another year? which we should have deemed a most happy thing had it been altered by the end of last year? and which has troubled the soul with deep disquietude? Has an important interest been trifled with? an urgent duty still delayed and delayed? and, consequently, a state of mind far from happy as towards God: so that the close of the past year has left us with admonitions pointed and aggravated by reproach? Who *then* would not exclaim, "Let it not be thus at the end of another year!"—Now if these reflections and admonitions shall have their proper effect in the ensuing year,—"Better" will be "the end of a thing than the beginning." May a gracious God grant that it may be so! that lessons given us at such a cost may not be unavailing;—the cost of so much peace and happiness withheld, to tell us how it cannot be enjoyed! the cost of so much time, and means, and knowledge, and mercy lost to enforce upon us a sense of the guilt of losing them!—Amidst such reflections on the past year, the first thing to be desired is, the

pardoning mercy of God through Christ. But surely not less desirable is it, that every admonition, every instructive lesson, enforced upon us by reflection on the past year, should go into practical effect during this we have entered on.

At the close of this year, should life be protracted so far, the motto will be applicable, if we can then say, "My lessons from reflection on the departed year are much less painful, and much more cheering, than at the close of the former;" if we can say this without any delusion from insensibility, for the painfulness of reflection may lessen from a wrong cause; but to say it with an enlightened conscience to witness, how delightful! To be then able to recall each particular, and to dwell on it a few moments,—"that was, before, a very painful consideration—*now*, . . . . . " "This, again, made me sad, and justly so,—*now*, . . . . !" "What shall I render to God for the mercy of his granting my prayer for all-sufficient aid? I will render to him, by his help, a still better year next."

The chief test of the true application of the proverb, that it will be a true sentence, is this, if then we shall have good evidence that we are become really more devoted to God. We, and our life, are *for Him*, or all is utterly cast away! In detachment from Him, think how all is reduced to vanity and wretchedness! The sense of this has often inflicted anguish on a reflective spirit sensible of a sad deficiency of this devotedness. "Here am I, with faculties, and an infinite longing—to be happy. Why am I not? I have an oppressive sense of evil, from which there is no escape. I have intense dissatisfaction, in myself and all things. Oh! it would not be so if I 'dwelt in God, and God in me.' My life, my time, each year, spite of all I do and enjoy, seem a gloomy scene of emptiness and vanity. It would not be felt so, if it were *for God* that I lived; if my affections, my activities, my years, my months, were devoted to *Him*." Without this, *no* year is good, in its progress or its end. A high degree of this

would have made our former years end nobly; would have made the last do so.

It is little more than putting the same thing in more general terms to say—the end will be better than the beginning, if we shall by then have practically learnt to live more strictly and earnestly for the greatest purposes of life. If we can say of it,—"It has been more redeemed from trifling and inferior uses. It has been more employed to purposes which always present their claims to me the more conspicuously the more seriously and religiously I think—more to the purposes of which I am the most secure against all repentance—the purposes which I can the most perfectly feel place me in a right element,—and concerning which I can the most confidently look to God for both approbation and assistance."

To this may be added, that if we shall have acquired a more effectual sense of the worth of time, the sentence, "Better is the end of a thing than the beginning," will be true. Being intent on the noblest purposes of life, will itself, in a great degree, create this "effectual sense." But there may require, too, a special thought of time itself—a habit of noting it—because it is so transient, silent, and invisible a thing. There may be a want of faith to "see this invisible," and of a sense of its flight. For want of this, and the sense too of its vast worth, what quantities reflection may tell us we have wasted in past years—in the last year! And, at the very times when we were heedlessly letting it pass by, throwing it away,—there were, here and there, men passionately imploring a day—an hour—a few moments—more. And at those same seasons some men, here and there, were most diligently and earnestly redeeming and improving the very moments we lost!—the identical moments,—for we had the same, and of the same length and value. Some of them are, in heaven itself, now enjoying the consequences. Where do *we* promise ourselves the consequences of those portions of time lost? The reflection on our waste and losses, in the past year, from

our little allotment of this most precious material, should powerfully come in, &c. The rule of its value is, the consideration of what might be done in it. Think of its separate portions in this light. How important to have a powerful habitual impression of all this! And if, this year, we shall acquire much more of this strong habitual sense,—if we become more covetous of time,—if we cannot waste it without much greater pain,—if we shall, therefore, lose and misspend much less,—then the text is true.

It will again be true, if, with regard to fellow-mortals, we can conscientiously feel that we have been to them more what Christians ought—than in the preceding year. They must be, in a measure, admitted into the judgment on the case, at least as evidence. There cannot be a very material improvement quite independently of their experience. It will therefore be happy to be able to call them to witness, at the term we are referring to, while a man shall say;—

"I am become more solicitous to act toward you in the fear of God.—I am become more conscientiously regardful of what is due to you, and set a higher importance on your welfare.—I have exerted myself more for your good.—On the whole, therefore, I stand more acquitted towards you than I have at the conclusion of any former season."

Another point of superiority we should hope the end may have over the beginning of the year is, that of our being in a better state of preparation for all that is to follow. Is it not the case, sometimes, that certain things presented to our thoughts, as what *may* take place, excite a consciousness that we are not well prepared for them? What then?—Should we be content carelessly to stand the hazard? Or trust in the vain refuge of a hope that we may never be so tried?—Stupid self-beguilement! the folly of childhood, without its innocence.—A mortal is to look with certainty for a number of things which will put his best preparation to the trial.—Who was ever too well prepared for sudden emergencies of trial?—too well

prepared for duty, temptation, or affliction?—too well prepared for the last thing that is to be encountered on earth? Now, did we close the last year quite as competently prepared as we would desire, for whatever may ensue? So that here at the beginning we can say, "Here now are a wisdom, a faith, a conscience, a vigilance, a fortitude, to venture boldly on." The answer, in most instances at least, would be, "No; I wish I were far better disciplined for the great Master's service.—I wish that I could say—I am quite willing to leave, in perfect uncertainty, all events to him, being, I hope, by his grace, in a habit of mind fitted to meet them, whatever they may be; but it is not yet so with me."—Here, then, is a most important improvement to be aimed at during *this* year.

It will be a great advantage and advancement to end the year with, if we shall then have accquired more of a rational and Christian indifference to life itself. But indeed there is no distinction between "rational" and "Christian," in this case. An earnest clinging to life is rational, except under the favour of Christianity, and there it is not. But notwithstanding this sovereign and only remedy for the fear of losing life, what an excessive attachment to it remains! It were well that this were less.—and that it lessened with the lessening of the object; so that each year expended should have reduced the passion at least as much as it has diminished the object. Has this been so the past year? "My property in life is now less by almost 400 days; so much less to cultivate and reap from. If they were of value, the value of the remainder is less after they are withdrawn. As to temporal good, I have but learnt the more experimentally that that cannot make me happy. I have therefore less of a delusive hope on this ground, as to the future. The spiritual good of so much time expended, I regard as transferred to eternity; so much, therefore, thrown into the scale of another life against this. And in addition, some of my valued friends are transferred thither also; so that another

scene has been growing rich by the losses of this. Besides, the remaining portion will probably be, in a natural sense, of a much worse quality. *Therefore*, as the effect of all this, my attachment to this life is loosening, and the attraction of another is augmenting."

If it was desirble that we should be able to say this at the recent close of the last year, is it not still more desirable we should, at the close of the present? Then we shall be able to say, in addition, "*I am glad the year is gone.*"

Now it must be seen, by a considerate mind, that such as these are the conditions on which the sentenee will be true, "Better is the end of a thing than the begining." And how exceedingly desirable that such might be the case with us, if we close this year on earth! But this will not be by the mere passing of the time. It is important to consider that this state of things at the end cannot be expected, unless it is realized in a due degree in the successive parts.

Are we beginning the year in such a spirit and plan? If there has been a melancholy failure in past years, how has it happened? All this cannot be, without our maintaining an habitual serious reference to the end of life itself. It cannot be, without an earnest religious discipline of our souls. It cannot be without the Divine Power working in us, and for us. And what shall impel us to desire and seek that blessed influence, if not such considerations as the preceding?

The concluding admonition is,—that we *may* not in this world attain the end of the year. Hence the necessity, that each small portion of life should close under the same circumstances, as the entire year.

The *sublime* of the sentence will be in the case of those who, beginning this year on earth, will at the end of it be in heaven!

## II.

### SPRING, AND ITS MORAL ANALOGIES.

"*Thou renewest the face of the earth.*"—The seasons of external nature, in the course of the year, are a considerably interesting part of what makes up our condition during our sojourn on this earth; and good men, from the Psalmist downward, have not been content that the effect of these seasons upon them should be confined to the mere external material condition, but have been desirous that the vicissitudes of nature should minister to the welfare of the mind.

The *spring* season especially has been regarded as fertile of what might afford salutary instruction in a pleasing vehicle. We are now in the very midst of this genial season; and before its flowers and bloom are past, we might do well to endeavour to draw from it something not quite so transient.

The vast importance to us, that this season should regularly and infallibly return in its time, is obvious the instant it is mentioned. But it is not so instantly recollected how entirely we are at the mercy of the God of nature for its return. We are in our places here on the surface of the earth, to wait in total dependence for Him to cause the seasons to visit our abode, as helpless and impotent as particles of dust. If the Power that brings them on, were to hold them back, we could only submit, or repine—and perish! His will could strike with an instant paralysis the whole moving system of nature. Let there be a suspension of his agency, and all would stop; or a change of it, and things would take a new and fearful course! Yet we are apt to think of the certainty of the return of the desired season, in some other light than that of the certainty that God will cause it to come. With a sort of passive irreligion we allow a something, conceived as an established order of nature, to take the place of the Author and Ruler of nature, forgetful that

all this is nothing but the continually acting power and will of God; and that nothing can be more absurd than the notion of God's having constituted a system to be, one moment, independent of himself.

Consider, next, this beautiful vernal season;—what a gloomy and unpromising scene and season it arises out of! It is almost like creation from chaos; like life from a state of death. If we might be allowed in a supposition so wide from probability, as that a person should not know what season is to follow, while contemplating the scene, and feeling the rigours of winter, how difficult it would be for him to comprehend or believe that the darkness, dreariness, bleakness, and cold—the bare, desolate, and dead aspect of nature could be so changed. If he could then in some kind of vision behold such a scene as that now spread over the earth—he would be disposed to say, "It cannot be;" "this is absolutely a new creation, or another world!"

Might we not take an instruction from this, to correct the judgments we are prone to form of the divine government? We are placed within one limited scene and period of the great succession of the divine dispensations—a dark and gloomy one—a prevalence of evil. We do not see how it *can be*, that so much that is offensive and grievous, should be introductory to something delightful and glorious. "Look, how fixed! how inveterate! how absolute! how unchanging! is not this a character of perpetuity?" If a better, nobler scene to follow is intimated by the spirit of prophecy, in figures analogous to the beauties of spring, it is regarded with a kind of despondency, as if prophecy were but a kind of sacred poetry; and is beheld as something to aggravate the gloom of the present, rather than to draw the mind forward in delightful hope. So we allow our judgments of the divine government,—of the mighty field of it, and of its progressive periods,—to be formed very much upon an exclusive view of the limited, dark portion of his dispensations which is immediately present to us!

But such judgments should be corrected by the spring blooming around us, so soon after the gloomy desolation of winter. The man that we were supposing so ignorant and incredulous, what would he *now* think of what he had thought *then*?

How welcome are the early signs, and precursory appearances of the spring; the earlier dawn of day; —a certain cheerful cast in the light, even though still shining over an expanse of desolation,—it has the appearance of a smile;—a softer breathing of the air, at intervals;—the bursting of the buds; the vivacity of the animal tribes; the first flowers of the season;—and, by degrees, a delicate dubious tint of green. It needs not that a man should be a poet, or a sentimental worshipper of nature, to be delighted with all.

May we suggest one analogy to this? The operation of the Divine Spirit in renovating the human soul, effecting its conversion from the natural state, is sometimes displayed in this gentle and gradual manner, especially in youth. In many cases, certainly, it seems violent and sudden, resembling the transition from winter to spring in the northern climates; but, in the more gradual instances, whether in youth or further on in life, it is most gratifying to perceive the first indications,—serious thoughts and emotions—growing sensibility of conscience—distaste for vanity and folly—deep solicitude for the welfare of the soul—a disposition to exercises of piety—a progressively clearer, more grateful, and more believing apprehension of the necessity and sufficiency of the work and sacrifice of Christ for human redemption. To a pious friend, or parent, this is more delightful than if he could have a vision of Eden, as it bloomed on the first day that Adam beheld it.

But we may carry the analogy into a wider application. It is most gratifying to perceive the signs of change on the great field of society. How like the early flowers,—the more benignant light—the incipient verdure, are the new desire of knowledge, and the schemes and efforts to impart it—the rising, zealous,

and rapidly enlarging activity to promote true religion; and the development of the principles and spirit of liberty. In this moral spring, we hope we are advanced a little way beyond the season of the earliest flowers.

The next observation on the spring season is, how reluctantly the worse gives place to the better! While the winter is forced to retire, it is yet very tenacious of its reign; it seems to make many efforts to return; it seems to hate the beauty and fertility that are supplanting it. For months we are liable to cold, chilling, pestilential blasts, and sometimes biting frosts. A portion of the malignant power lingers or returns to lurk, as it were, under the most cheerful sunshine; so that the vegetable beauty remains in hazard, and the luxury of enjoying the spring is attended with danger to persons not in firm health. It is too obvious to need pointing out, how much resembling this there is in the moral state of things;—in the hopeful advance and improvement of the youthful mind,—in the early and indeed the more advanced stages of the Christian character—and in all the commencing improvements of human society.

We may contemplate, next, the lavish, boundless diffusion, riches, and variety of beauty in the spring. Survey a single confined spot, or pass over leagues, or look from a hill; infinite affluence every where! and so you know, too, that it is over a wide portion of the globe at the same time; it is under your feet, spreads out to the horizon, meets every sense. And all this created within a few weeks! To *every* observer the immensity, variety, and beauty are obvious. But to the perceptions of the skilful *naturalist* all this is indefinitely multipled. Reflect, what a display is here of the boundless resources of the great Author. He flings forth, as it were, an unlimited wealth—a deluge of beauty, immeasurably beyond all that is strictly necessary; an immense quantity that *man* never sees, not even in the mass. It is true, that man is not the only creature for which the gratification is designed.

But it is man alone, of the earth's inhabitants, that can take any account of it as beauty, or as wisdom, and power, and goodness. Such unlimited profusion may well assure us that He who can afford thus to lavish treasures so far beyond what is simply necessary, can never fail of resources for all that is or ever shall be necessary.

May we not venture to think that this vast superfluity of pleasing objects, conferred on this temporary abode of our feeble and sinful existence, may be taken as one of the intimations of a grand enlargement of faculties in another state? We may assume that in any world to which good men shall be assigned, there will be an immense affluence of the wonderful works of the Almighty, and shall there not be such an enlargement of capacity and perception that there shall be a less *waste* of those admirable works? We would be willing to suppose that there may be a less proportion of them placed beyond the power of attention; less that should seem to answer no end to the devout contemplator.

We may observe, again, on this profusion and diversity of beauty,—what an ample provision it is for those faculties in our nature, which are not to be accounted the highest and noblest. The mere organs of sense receive immediately their pleasing influences. Through those combined susceptibilities of our blended constitution of body and mind, which we call taste, we have pleasurable perceptions of beauty, grace, harmony, grandeur. And the imagination has a large share of the enjoyment. All this is most evidently an intended adaptation. It is good, therefore, that man should have the exercise, the cultivation, and the pleasure of these faculties. What the proper regulation and limits may be—and how to adjust the proportion and the balance between these and higher interests and pleasures—is a matter for conscientious judgment. But the general fact is most obvious that the Creator intended the exercise and gratification of faculties for which he has made such copious provision.

But it is a most serious consideration here, that the value and the final object of this exercise and pleasure are lost, if they do not tend to and combine with religion; if a man observes, and admires—and enjoys, and is enchanted with the fine feeling, and all the while forgets the adorable and beneficent Author, or feels no veneration or grateful aspiring of soul toward Him. Our relation to Him is our supreme and most vital interest, and the interest of every other relation is meant to be coincident, subordinate, and contributory. The disregard of this great law comes under the condemnation of "loving the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever." Much of this impiety there is, among the admirers of the beauties of nature and of the spring. It were no mere shape of imagination, if we were to represent such a lamentable spectacle as this, namely,—a man of cultivated mind, vividly perceptive faculties, refined taste and poetic fancy, straying among the vernal fields and groves with a fond enchantment, with a sentiment for each flower and blooming shrub, and singing bird, and gay insect;—diffusing his soul in fine sympathy with all that smiles around him, but with no recognition of Him that creates and animates the scene! All that scene is no more than a reflection of a few rays of the divine glory. But this admirer looks not toward the bright Reality. He takes this faint reflection as if it were *itself* the essential beauty and glory, and cannot see how it fades and perishes when impiety like this comes between it and heaven. In some instances, as by a judicial retribution, the man is permitted to consummate his impiety by making nature his god;—fancying some kind of mysterious, all-pervading, yet not intelligent spirit, which ejects the Divinity and takes his place.

The spring has always been regarded as obviously presenting an image of youthful life. The newness, liveliness, fair appearance, exuberance of the vital principle, rapid growth—such are the flattering points of likeness. But there are also less pleasing circum-

stances of resemblance, the frailty and susceptibility, so peculiarly liable to fatal injury from inauspicious influences, blights, and diseases. Those who have to watch over infancy, childhood, and early youth, can often see, in smitten plants and flowers, the emblems of what they have to fear for their charge. There is the circumstance, that the evil in the human disposition can grow even faster than the good. As in spring, the weeds, the useless and noxious vegetables, the offensive or venomous animals, thrive as well as the useful and salutary productions; and that too, not only without attention to assist them, but in spite of efforts to repress or extirpate them. There is the circumstance, that is yet to be proved, whether the early season will have its full value ultimately; whether fair and hopeful appearances and beginnings will not end in a mortifying disappointment. How many a rich bloom of the trees comes to nothing! How many a field of corn promising in the blade, disappoints in the harvest! Under this point of the analogy, the vernal human beings are a subject for pensive, for almost melancholy contemplation. There is one specially instructive point of resemblance. Spring is the season for diligent cultivation; so is youth. What if the spring were suffered to go past without any cares and labours of husbandry! But see how the parallel season of human life is, in numberless instances, consumed away under a destitution of the discipline requisite to form a rational being to wisdom, goodness, and happiness; through the criminal neglect of those who have the charge and the accountableness, and the almost infallibly consequent carelessness of the undisciplined creatures themselves. One shall not seldom be struck with the disparity between these two provinces of cultivation. The garden shall be put in neat order, the fruit-tree trimmed and trained; the corn-field exhibiting a clean shining breadth of green; the children and youth bearing every mark of mental and moral rudeness. On the contrary, it is delightful to see the spring season of life advancing under such a cultivation, of

the instructor's care, of conscientious self-tuition, and of divine influence, as to give good hope of rich ensuing seasons. A part of the pleasure imparted by the beauty of the spring is, whether we are exactly aware of it or not, in an anticipation of what it is to result in. Though as we have said, there is much for uncomplacent presentiment in beholding the bloom, animation, and unfolding faculties of early life, yet they who are affectionately interested in the sight, are insensibly carried forward in imagination to the virtues and accomplishments which they are willing to foresee in the mature and advanced states. It may be added, as one more point in this parallel, that the rapid passing away of the peculiar beauty of spring, gives an emblem of the transient continuance of the lively and joyous period of human life.

They are not all pleasing ideas that arise in the contemplation of the vernal season. There is one of a profoundly gloomy character, that of the portentous general contrast between the beauty of the *natural*, and the deformity of the *moral* world. A correspondence seems to be required in things which are associated together. Survey then the fair scene and think what kind of beings, to correspond to it, the rational inhabitants ought to be; not a few, a small intermingled portion, but the general race. Would not the conception be,—innocence, ingenuousness, all the kind and sweet affections, bright refined thought, spontaneous advancement in all good, piety to heaven? But now look on the actual fact—and that, without going so far off as those fine tracts of the earth where man is the most cruel and ferocious of the wild beasts that infest them. See in these more civilized regions, the coarse debasement—the selfishness—the hostile artifices—the ill tempers and malignant passions—the practices of injustice—the obstinacy in evil habits—the irreligion, both negative and daringly positive! Within the memory of many of us, how much of the vernal beauty of Europe, every year, has been trodden down under the feet, or blasted by the ravages of hostile

armies! how many a blooming bower has given out its odours mingled with the putrid effluvia of human creatures killed by one another! Such is the correspondence of the inhabitants to the beautiful scenery of their dwelling-place! The fair luxury of spring serves to bring out, more prominently, the hideous features of the *moral* condition!

But even if we could keep out of view this directly *moral* contrast, there are still other circumstances of a gloomy colour. Amidst this glowing life of the vernal season, there are languor, and sickness, and infirm old age, and death! While nature smiles, there are many pale countenances that do *not*. Sometimes you have met, slowly pacing the green meadow or the garden, a figure emaciated by illness, or feeble with age; and were the more forcibly struck by the spectacle as seen amidst a luxuriance of life. For a moment, you have felt as if all the living beauty faded or receded from around, in the shock of the contrast. You may have gone into a house beset with roses and all the pride of spring, to see a person lingering and sinking in the last feebleness of mortality. You may have seen a funeral train passing through a flowery avenue. The ground which is the depository of the dead, bears, not the less for that, its share of the beauty of spring. The great course of nature pays no regard to the particular circumstances of man,—no suspension, no sympathy!

To a person in the latter stages of life, if destitute of the sentiments and expectations of *Religion*, this world of beauty must lose its captivations; it must even take a melancholy aspect; for what should strike him so directly and forcibly as the thought, that he is soon to leave it? It may even appear too probable that this is the *last* spring season he shall behold; while he looks upon it, he may feel an intimation that he is bidding it adieu; his paradise is retiring behind him, and what but a dreary immeasurable desert is before him? *This* will blast the fair scene while he surveys it, however rich its hues and the sunshine that gilds it!

On the contrary, and by the same rule, this fair dis-

play of the Creator's works and resources will be gratifying, the most and the latest, to the soul animated with the love of God, and the confidence of soon entering on a nobler scene. "Let me," he may say, "look once more at what my Divine Father has diffused even hither as a faint intimation of what he has somewhere else. I am pleased with this as a distant outskirt, as it were, of the paradise toward which I am going." Though we are not informed of the exact manner of a happy existence in another state, assuredly, there will be an ample and eternal exercise of the faculties on the wondrous works of the Almighty, and therefore a mode of perception adapted to apprehend their beauty, harmony, and magnificence. It is not for us to conjecture whether good spirits corporeally detached from this world, are therefore withdrawn from all such relation to it, or knowledge of it, as would admit of their retaining still some perception of the material beauty and sublimity displayed upon it by the Creator. But it may well be presumed that in one region or other of his dominions, the intellectual being will be empowered with a faculty to perceive *every* order of phenomena in which his glory is manifested. If we think of an angel traversing this earth, though he has not *our* mode of apprehending this fair vision of spring, it were absurd to suppose that therefore all this material grace and splendour is to him obliterated, blank, and indifferent. We shall not then believe that any change which shall elevate the human spirit, will by that very fact destroy, as to its perception, admiration, and enjoyment, *any* of the characters on the works of God.

We close the contemplation by observing, what an immensity of attainable interest and delight, of one class only, besides the sublimer, there is, that may be lost,—and all is lost, if the soul be lost!

## III.

### AUTUMN, AND ITS MORAL ANALOGIES.

"*We all do fade as a leaf.*"—Our lives have been prolonged once more to witness the wide progress of decay over the field of nature. The infinite masses of foliage, which unfolded so beautifully in vegetable life, in the spring, and have adorned our landscape during the summer, have faded, fallen, and perished. We have beheld the "grace of the fashion" of them disclosed, continuing awhile bright in the sunshine, and gone for ever. Now we are admonished not to see the very *leaves* fade, without being reminded that *something else* is also fading; this is a fact more intimately realized to us than any thing in the external world can be, but of which we have a most marvellous faculty, if we may so call it, of being insensible. Is it not so? How many of us can—or can any of us—say, they have had during the recent season, as distinct and prolonged a reflection on the fact, that our own mortal existence is fading, as we have had a perception of the fading and extinction of vegetable life It would seem as if the continued pressure of ill health, or the habitual spectacle of sickness and decline in our friends, were necessary in order to keep us reminded of the truth which is expressed in the text.

We should do well to fix our attention awhile on this very pernicious fact, of our inaptitude to feel and reflect that our mortal condition is fading; and then to note and urge a few of those monitory circumstances which verify this our declining state. Let us look a little at the habits of our feeling, in regard to this matter.

We are very unapt to recognize the common lot and destiny of all human life—that it is to fade, and is fading. The vast world of the departed is out of our sight,—even what was the material and visible part. What is constantly in our sight is the world of the living; and we are unapt to think of them as all appointed not to be living. Perhaps it was but very few times in the life

of the Persian monarch that he was in so reflective and moral a mood, as when, looking on his innumerable army, he thought, and wept to think, that in less than a century they would all be dead. In our own case, while we see the countless population, in all the passions and actions of life, it is but now and then, perhaps rather unfrequently, that the reflection, like a solemn shade, comes over us,—"these are all hastening out of sight, tending to dissolution and dust! Such a living scene our ancestors beheld; but where are now both those they looked on and themselves?"—Man as he *is*, fills the attention, and precludes the thought of man as he is appointed and *going to be*.

We note a circumstance which aids the deception, that the most decayed and faded portion of the living world is much less in sight than the fresh and vigorous. Think how many infirm, sick, debilitated, languishing, and almost dying persons there are, that are rarely or never out in public view,—not met in our streets, roads, or places of resort,—not in our religious assemblies! And then "out of sight out of mind" in a great degree! Thus we look at the living world so as not to read the destiny written on every forehead, and in this thoughtlessness are the more apt to forget our own.

But we are very prone to forget *our own* destiny, even while we do recognize the *general* appointment to fade and vanish. The great general appointment is brought in our view, by many things which we cannot help perceiving. There is no avoiding to observe something of the process of fading. It is obvious that many of our fellow mortals are dying;—that many are pining in sickness, and consuming away under incurable distempers;—that many are changing in appearance, withering down, gradually declining in strength, and sinking into infirmity and feebleness. But nevertheless, we have some unaccountable power and instinct to dissociate ourselves from the general condition and relationship of humanity. "All men think all men mortal but themselves."—"*I* am not hopelessly sick.—*I* am not sinking into feebleness.—*I* am not withering within an inch of the dust." This is thought-

lessly suffered to become, in the feeling, or rather insensibility, of the mind, much the same thing as if *I* had no such thing to apprehend;—as if that general lot were not mine!

Have you not been sometimes struck or amazed at this, in observing others, or in self-reflection? How is it, you have said—How comes it to be possible, that men can see the partakers of their own nature and destiny, withering and falling from the tree of life, and calmly look at them in their fall and in the dust, with hardly one pointed reflection turned on themselves! As if the careless spectator should say, "Well, they must go:—there is no help for them! unfortunate lot! but it is nothing to me, except to pity them for a moment, and be glad that I am under no such disastrous decree!" So little is there of ominous sympathy felt, while men see neighbours, acquaintance, friends, relatives, one by one, fading, falling, and vanishing! It might seem as if they were not considered as having belonged to the great human fraternity; as if they had not been *exemplifications* of what man is, and is appointed to, to admonish and alarm those who continue to live,—but ill-fated *exceptions* to the common lot, to give the rest an occasion of triumph, that *they* exist under quite a different law! "They were not *of* us, for if they had been *of* us, they would not have gone *from* us." Or as if each survivor, especially if in health, and not old, believed the antediluvian privilege of longevity had devolved to him, regarding those who had departed as of the frail race of seventy years! If the actual vanishing of individuals from the grand community is taken so lightly by those who remain, it is no wonder that seeing persons decline and fade into old age and infirmity should have little sympathetic power to remind others of their own frail mortality; at least those who are a stage or two less advanced in life, even though it were but a difference of ten or fifteen years. Thus men are under some kind of spell and beguilement on their feeling which denies them the sense of being involved in the common lot.

It is true, it were absurd to imagine there should on

the supposition of the most perfectly rectified and expanded state of human feeling, be such a kind of community-sentiment as if they were almost to feel their own infirmity and decline, in mere sympathy with that of others. But still this self-defensive unconcern, this not being forcibly admonished that our lot is of a piece with the common lot, is an unnatural, pernicious, and irrational state of mind. Are not, for example, young persons all the worse, in point of wisdom, and the right purpose and use of life, from allowing themselves to regard their condition as so entirely disconnected with old age,—so unrelated to it,—as if centuries and centuries had to pass away, before they should become old? Are not those who are in strong health as if they were on a different planet from those who are feeble or sick? Are not the living, as if it never could be, that *they* should come to be in the state of the dead?

We are apt to regard life much more as a thing that we *positively possess* than as a thing that we are *losing*, and in a train to *cease possessing*. We are considering life in the sense of the duration of living. We thoughtlessly permit an imposition on our feelings, as if life were a substantive property, which we possessed years since and equally now possess. To be alive is the same consciousness *now* as *then;* and so we forget the essentially different condition we are in. Life in the case of a being that should be certainly immortal might be considered as an absolute possession. But with us, life is expenditure: we have it but as continually losing it; we have no use of it, but as continually wasting it. Suppose a man confined in some fortress, under the doom to stay there till his death; and suppose there is there for his use, a dark reservoir of water, to which it is certain none can ever be added. He knows, suppose, that the quantity is not very great; he cannot penetrate to ascertain how much, but it *may* be *very little*. He has drawn from it by means of a fountain a good while already, and draws from it every day;—but how would he feel each time of drawing, and each time of thinking of it? not as if he had a pe-

rennial spring to go to; not, "I have a reservoir,—I may be at ease." No! but, "I had water yesterday; —I have water to-day;—but my having had it, and my having it to-day, is the very cause that I shall *not* have it on some day that is approaching. At the same time I am compelled to this fatal expenditure!" So of our mortal, transient life! And yet men are very indisposed to admit the plain truth that life is a thing which they are in no other way possessing, than as necessarily consuming; and that even in this imperfect sense of possession, it becomes every day *less* a possession! We sometimes see that the longer a man has been in the expenditure of it, the more securely he seems to feel it a property positive, entire, and his own.

With many, the plain testimony of time comes home with far too little force,—time had, and spent, and gone, since their recorded nativity. They have attained the age of forty, fifty, fifty-five, sixty, or more, and yet will not lay it to heart, that they have entered, or gone a great way forward in the latter part of any probable length of life.

It may be observed that some persons, after arriving at the part of life which we call "middle age," remain a good while but little altered in their feeling of health, in their power of activity, or even in their appearance,—a great privilege!—but if they be not persons of serious reflection, it may be very pernicious to their highest interests. They will allow themselves to feel as if they still belonged to a much earlier stage. They can associate still with the youthful, on somewhat like equal terms. They will consolidate all their worldly habits, and give themselves up to schemes formed for a long time to come. They feel as if they had a fine, long, protracted summer season, to make the most of life and the world. They reckon, probably, on the utmost term of mortal life, and with great self-complacency, pass by the graves of their departed sickly coevals. Some of these persons retain so much spirit, vivacity, activity, and good ap-

pearance, that they are not as yet much haunted with the aversion and dread of being accounted *old*.

But it is obvious to remark, that many persons fading into the decline of life, betray a solicitous reluctance to being considered and classed with the elderly and the old. They discover, perhaps in spite of some effort, a sensation of chagrin at hearing expressions which directly, or by implication, assign them to the aged class; prematurely assign them they think, or would have it thought; so that it becomes a point of complaisance to beware of using any such expressions in their presence. Some such persons have recourse to expedients, undignified, and at the same time unavailing, for the purpose of keeping their former ground,—as, an ill-judged labour of personal decoration, a style of dress and ornaments perhaps little worthy of intelligence and piety at *any* age; but at any rate inappropriate to any but the more lightsome form and unfaded countenance;—a forced, over-acted vivacity, even an attempted rivalry, with not the gayety only, but the very levity of youth, as if they positively would not be old enough to be grave on any subject;—a resolute addiction to amusements, and what is called company.

Such are some of the characteristics of men's insensibility to the solemn fact that "we all do fade as a leaf." Now this insensibility is partly *wilful;* for it is partly owing to our indulging a reluctance to perceive and think of the signs and proofs which remind us of the fact that we are fading. Therefore it is highly proper there should be a solemn remonstrance against this perverse indisposition, and an endeavour to press on the attention those circumstances and reflections which are adapted to remind us of the fading, vanishing condition of our mortal existence. They are mighty in number! If the soul would expand itself, and with a lively sensibility to receive upon it the significance, the glancing intimation, the whispered monition of all things that are adapted to remind it of the fact,—what a host of ideas would strike it! Then we

should hardly see a shadow pass,—or a vapour rise,—or a flower fade,—or a leaf fall,—still less a human visage withered in age,—but we should have a thought of the transient continuance of our life.

It would not be foreign to the purpose to reflect how many successive generations of men have faded and vanished since the text itself was written; as many as there have been falls of the leaf since the first autumn which the oldest person among us can remember, at the average duration. Let such a person glance on the long repetition of this great change over the face of the earth,—and think of MAN! And imagine some great spirit to have been an observer of the human race through all this series of ages!—within his view the entire multitude gone—once,—and once again,—and still again!

To our view, however, there is a grand circumstance of deception, with respect to the removal and the renewal of the race. Human beings are continually going and coming, so that, though all die, MAN in his vast assemblage, is always here. If there were not an essential absurdity in making the supposition that a great majority of the whole race were, at successive periods, to sink in dissolution at once, or such a portion as inhabited any one country, *that* might be imagined an amazingly striking phenomenon to those that remained, to grow into another population. But the order of the world is that men be withdrawn one by one, one here and one there, leaving the mighty mass, to general appearance, still entire. Except in the case of vast and desolating calamities. Thus we see nothing parallel to the general autumnal fading of the leaf. More like the *evergreens*, which lose their leaves by individuals, and still maintain their living foliage,—to the thoughtless spectator, the human race is presented under such a fallacious appearance, as if it always lived.

But a man should have serious consideration enough to look through this deception. An aged person, especially if he has always continued chiefly in one

neighbourhood, can verify to himself that he has actually seen one whole distinguishable generation fade and disappear;—can recollect who his early acquaintances were around the district, and has seen them gradually go; and now sees that they are nearly all gone,—only himself and a very few others remaining, like the last few faded leaves, lingering and fluttering on a tree. Indeed, if a very old man, he has seen the main substance of two generations vanish. But let those even in very early life consider, that they have seen one and another near them fade and fall; and how many before what we regard as the proper season for fading!

Here another warning suggestion arises; that we allow ourselves to miscalculate the appropriate season for fading. Our imagination places that season in old age. Most delusively! for surely that cannot be taken as the appropriate season, long previously to which the grand majority actually do fade into dissolution. Those who live to quite an advanced old age are so vastly smaller a proportion, that it were most absurd to take them as representative of the human lot, in respect to length of life. The period to be accounted in a general collective calculation, as the proper term of mortality, cannot rightly be placed beyond such a stage in life as a large proportion of men do attain, but not exceed. The comparison with *the leaves* here again fails. The main mass of the foliage of the forest does continue on to the late period which none of it can survive. Not so in the case of human beings. The great majority of them are not appointed to reach what we are accustomed to regard as the late autumn of life. Therefore young persons are to be earnestly warned against calculating on that as *even a probability*. They are apt to overlook, in their calculation, all causes of decay and dissolution but that of mere protracted time. But do let them consider how few comparatively are left to the mere wearing out by time! On the field of life there are a thousand things in operation to anticipate time. These are to

be taken into the account, and as forming the far greater part of it, in conjecturing at any probable term for the duration of life. If these be taken into the account, how very limited is the term of probability! Then let no young persons amuse themselves with flattering lies, and say, "We may *probably* live to the far off term of eighty!" But some of them may perhaps truly say, "We do not much think about such calculations in any way. It is enough that for the present we are youthful and blooming; there is no fading, nor sign of its approach." So have many felt, and perhaps said, in answer to grave admonitions, who, before the next fall of the leaf, have withered and died! So before the fading of next autumn will many, many more, now gay and blooming.

But without insisting on these threatening possibilities of premature decline, consider that, to a reflective mind, the constant, inevitable progress *toward* fading would appear very much related to it; to have daily, less and less of that intermediate space which is all that there can be between. One has looked sometimes on the flowers of a meadow which the mower's scythe was to invade the next day;—perfect life and beauty as yet,—but to the mind they have seemed already fading, through the anticipation. If we turn to those who are a good way, or quite far advanced in life, they can tell how rapidly that vernal season has passed away;—how much it looks in the review like an absolutely preternatural fleetness of time. As to their now more advanced period, there are many palpable intimations in their experience to remind them of the truth in the text. Even those who are ranked as the middle aged, have much that speaks to them in a serious and warning voice. They are most of them sensible by their consciousness, as well as by the record of years, that one grand season of their terrestrial existence is gone by. Let them think what they feel to be gone;—freshness of life;—vernal prime;—overflowing spirits;—elastic, bounding vigour;—insuppressible activity;—quick, ever varying emotion;—delightful unfolding

of the faculties;—the sense of more and more power of both body and spirit;—the prospect as if life were entire before them;—and all overspread with brightness and fair colours! This is gone! and this change is not a little toward the fading. Those poignantly feel it to be so who look back with sadness, or with vain fretfulness, to think it cannot be recalled.

But there are still more decided indications of decay. Some indeed remain considerably stationary: but as to the majority, there are circumstances that will not let them forget *whereabouts* they are in life; feelings of positive infirmity;—diminished power of exertion;—gray hairs;—failure of sight; besetting pains; apprehensive caution against harm and inconvenience;—often what are called nervous affections;—slight injuries to the body far less easily repaired. All this is a great progress in the fading. The appearance partakes of and indicates the decline; not so perceptible to the person himself, or to constant associates, but often strikes acquaintance who see one another after long absence.

From this stage there is a very rapid descent toward complete old age, with its accumulated privations and oppressions; general prostration of strength;—often settled disorders operating with habitual grievance;—loss of memory;—furrows marking the countenance;—great suffering by little inconveniences;—confinement in a great measure to a spot;—a strange and mighty disseverment, as it were, from the man's own earthly youthful self. In some instances there is a last decline into an utterly withered state of existence;—imbecility wholly of body and mind. The final point is that of the fallen leaves, to be reduced to dust.

It will, perhaps, be said, "This is a most gloomy view of human life. Why exhibit it at such width, and darken it with so many aggravations of shade, as if to cloud the little sunshine that glimmers on our lot?" We answer, *nothing worth* is that sunshine that will not pierce radiantly through this cloud. No complacency, no cheerfulness, no delight, is worth having

that cannot be enjoyed *together with* the contemplation of this view of our mortal condition. Such an exhibition—is it truth? is it fact? and is it truth and fact irresistibly bearing on our own concern? Then the endeavour to be escaping from the view and thought of it would be a thing incomparably more gloomy to behold than all that this exhibition presents! because that would betray the want, the neglect, the rejection of the grand resource against the gloom of our mortal state and destiny.

To an enlightened beholder of mankind, it is *not* their being all under the doom to fade, be dissolved, and vanish,—it is not *that* that strikes him as the deepest gloom of the scene; no!—but their being thoughtless of this their condition,—their not seeking the true and all-powerful consolation under it;—their not earnestly looking and aiming toward that glorious state into which they may emerge from this fading and perishing existence. The melancholy thing, by emphasis, is, that beings under such a doom should disregard that grand countervailing economy of the divine beneficence in which "life and immortality are brought to light,"—in which the Lord of life has himself submitted to the lot of mortals in order to redeem them to the prospect of another life, where there is no fading, decline, or dissolution!

Let us not then absurdly turn from the view because it is grave and gloomy, but dwell upon it, often and intensely, for the great purpose of exciting our spirits to a victory over the vanity of our present condition;—to gain from it, through the aid of the Divine Spirit, a mighty impulse toward a state of ever-living, ever-blooming existence beyond the sky. A man who feels this would accept no substitute consolation against the gloomy character of this mortal life; not the highest health, not the most exuberant spirits,—nor early youth itself, if it were possible for that to be renewed. "No, rather let me fade—let me languish—let me feel that mortality is upon me, and that the terrestrial scene is darkening around me, but with this inspiration

of faith and hope—this rising energy—which is already carrying me out of an existence which is all frailty, into one of vigour, and power, and perpetuity !' '

## IV.

## WINTER, AND ITS MORAL ANALOGIES.

"*Thou hast made*—WINTER!"—It is our own fault, if any very marked part of the great vicissitudes of the natural world in which we are sojourning, shall pass by us without yielding instruction of a special kind, as well as that which we should be reaping from all our time. There is some peculiar inscription by the "finger of God" on each presented view of his works.

The winter is generally felt as an unpleasing and gloomy season of the year; the more desirable is it to make it yield us some special good, by way of compensation. The practicability of doing this, displays the excellence of mind above matter, and the advantage of religion. The sky is gloomy;—the light brief and faint;—the earth torpid, sterile, and deprived of beauty;—the whole system of the elements ungenial, like a general refusal of nature to please us, or afford us any thing. Well, but MIND, with the aid of wisdom and religion, may not only flourish within itself, but may compel the very winter to afford assistance to its doing so. It may raise a richer produce than what the agriculturist can in spring and summer. And perhaps the truth is, that wisdom and piety might find or make all seasons and scenes nearly equal, in point of yielding the most valuable advantage. There are gratifying examples to this purpose.

Let us consider what the winter season might offer in aid of instructive reflection. We may revert to the expression, "Thou hast *made*—winter." God's work and wisdom in it are to be regarded. The Almighty Maker has fixed in the order of the world that which is the natural cause of the winter; a most remarkable

adjustment of supreme wisdom and power, appearing at first view, something like irregularity and disorder, —that is, the inclination of the earth's axis. We may note the signal benefits of this adjustment to the whole earth, stated by Dr. Keill, as contrasted with what the consequences would have been of a position which would have made the seasons always the same. After this, we may observe that the winter illustrates to us the beneficent principle of distribution acted on by the Divine Providence. *We* must have our *winter*, in order that the inhabitants of another part of the world may have their *summer*. Not but that even we, separately considered, are the better for this order; but set that out of view, and even suppose it were not so, —the people of the southern hemisphere need to have their season of light and warmth, to make their allotted ground productive, and ripen its produce. The sun and the fine season, leave us to go to them. The winter, therefore, seems to inculcate upon us a great lesson of equity and charity,—that we should be willing to share the benefits of the system with the distant portions of our great wide-spread family,—willing to part with a pleasing possession for a season, for their sakes, even if we could retain it. The lesson might be brought down to matters within a narrower circle.

The winter should, by the very circumstance of its unproductiveness, remind us of the care and bounty of divine Providence, in that other seasons are granted us which furnish supplies for this, and for the whole year. There is to be a season producing nothing, but therefore there are seasons producing more than their share. The winter may admonish *us*, of these colder climates, how entirely we are at the mercy of the Sovereign Lord of nature,—how wholly dependent on the order which he has established. This is less obvious in those regions where they *have* no winter, in our sense of the word. But *here*, look at the earth, speaking generally! look at the trees! an obdurate negation;—an appearance of having ceased to be for us;—under a mighty interdict of heaven! We might nearly as

well go to the graves of the dead to ask for sympathy and aid. The ground seems not willing to yield us any thing but a grave; and *that* it is yielding every day to numbers to whom it would have yielded nothing else! Striking consideration! that for *this* service the earth is always ready. How many graves for the dying it will afford during these months, in which it will afford no sustenance to the living! Would it not be a most solemn manifestation, if, in the living crowd, we could discern those to whom the earth, the ground, has but one thing more to supply?

The winter has a character of inclemency and rigour,—has ideas and feelings associated with it of hardship, infelicity, suffering. In this, it should be adapted to excite thoughtful and compassionate sentiments respecting the distress and suffering that are in the world; the distresses attendant in a special manner on the season itself; but, also, hardships, distresses, oppressive situations, considered generally. Such consideration should naturally be promoted by the grave character of the season, in which nature seems clad in mourning. The fair and cheerful aspect of the world is veiled, as if, that our thoughts may take another direction.

Winter discovers, in a somewhat special manner, the dispositions of mankind *thus:*—men are in that season reduced more to their own resources,—are deprived of a delightful scene of varieties, liberties, and entertaining circumstances and occupations;—are much more driven home, as it were, to themselves, and their own means;—and their dispositions are shown in what they will now choose to do;—we mean in such part of their time as is really at their disposal. How pleasing it would be, to see generally a recourse to such expedients ior spending that time, as should tend to individual and social improvement. It is so, we trust, in many instances. It is generally so in some countries, at least *one*, Iceland. But look at a large portion of *our* community, occupied in vain and dissipating amusements. Some in revels of excessive festivity,

—in convivial assemblies for utter trifling and levity —card parties—theatres. Winter thus shows what persons will choose by preference, when the dreary state of the natural world throws them upon their own means. But what will the vain and thoughtless do, when the world, with *all* its seasons, *finally* excludes them ?

> " Say, dreamers of gay dreams !
> How will you weather an eternal night
> Where such expedients fail ?"

As to winter,—though it is the darker portion of time, it may possibly not be the darker portion of the history of mankind. Some of the most dreadful of their courses of crime have generally been considerably suspended during that season. We allude especially to their horrid slaughters under the name of *war*. Though indeed the unrelenting fury of late wars has made exceptions to this.

Another thing observable of winter is,—how strikingly it shows the transitory quality of the beauty, variety, magnificence, and riches, which had been spread over the natural world. Recall to your imagination what you so lately beheld and admired.—Brief description of the scene as in spring and summer. —All vanished like a dream! gone into air, into the dust, and into dead masses! It is amazing to think what an infinity of pleasing objects have perished ; so soon perished and gone ! Just as yesterday the fair profusion was *here ; now* it is no more to us than the earliest beauty of Eden. It is for ever gone ! never to be that beauty again, that is, identically. The change is as if some celestial countenance had for a while beamed in smiles on the earth, but were now averted to some other world ; and then the earth had no power to retain the glory and beauty ; they disowned and left it ; and left us on the bare ground over which the vision of enchantment had been spread.

May we not here find an instructive emblem of another order of things ? Think of the bloom and vigour, and animated action and expression of the human

person, destroyed by sickness or disease! Think of delightful hopes, shedding spring and summer on the heart, suddenly extinguished! Think of a state of exuberant prosperity changed by a rapid reverse to one of difficulty, calamity, or desolation! JOB! Examples are occurring in all times. You have seen men displaying themselves in splendour and pomp, as if they thought themselves mirrors to reflect the sun,—putting all sorts of men, and things, and arts in requisition —assembling around them the wealthy, the gay, the fashionable, and the tribe of self-interested flatterers. They have had a brilliant and envied career for a while, but the effect of public calamity, or of individual disaster has suddenly come upon them, and they have passed from the glare and sunshine of a summer state to a dreary winter of condition, almost without an interval! Or there has been a more moderate and modest state; ease, plenty, and comfort,—but this changed to loss, ruin, and indigence,—a winter indeed! Or there is recollected some instance of a man who has seen his family grown up, or nearly so, and entering on life under the most promising appearances. But several of them, within a short space of time, have been smitten by death,—another, through ill-judged or unfortunate connexions, has been plunged in misery for life:—and another perverted irreclaimably to a reprobate course. Alas! it is gloomy and oppressive winter with *him!* The sight of the graves of those who are gone *makes* winter, though all the bloom and verdure of spring were smiling round;—or a visit to his unfortunate child;—or the very name of the depraved one! The consideration of the transitoriness of the beauty and glory of the year, as forced upon us by the winter, easily carries our thoughts to these parallel things in the condition of human life.

There is another thing which the winter may suggest to our thoughts, that resemblance to it which there may be in the state of the mind, in respect to its best interests. The dreary season and scene may thus impress a salutary admonition. Indeed, the con-

trary season might do it, though it were in the way of *contrast*. But let not the admonition by *resemblance* be lost upon us. Is a man afraid to turn from the gloom and cold without to see what there is within? Would he even rather contemplate and endure the greater rigours of a still more northern climate awhile, than to take a sojourn in his own soul? Yes; there *are* persons who would rather be wherever our adventurers in search of the north-west passage may probably now be, than "make diligent search" into the state of their own spirits. Truly the winter in the soul is far worse than any season and aspect of external nature. Suppose a contrary state to be fully prevalent in the soul, how small an evil, comparatively, *then*, would be all that is inclement and gloomy in the seasons and scenes of nature! Suppose communion with heaven,—animated affections, ardent devotion to God and our Redeemer,—a strong exercise of improving faith, a dwelling with delight among the truths, promises, and anticipative visions, which God has revealed, like walking and regaling among the trees of paradise,—a vigorous prosecution of holiness,—and the joys of a good conscience! Why, if such a man were placed in the frozen zone, and could live there, he would be happy! He would have a triumph over the rigours of nature! There would be feeble and oblique rays of the sun, or for a while, none at all, but direct beams from the throne of heaven! Or place him in our region, and the light of his soul, the ever-burning lamp, blazing with element from the empyreal sky, would overpower the darkness of our gloomiest season; the vernal spirit within would to him transform the desolate aspect! But let all this be reversed, and what a desolation! With such a state within, the most delicious scene on earth would be blasted. Eden itself was so to our first parents when they had sinned! Oh! what an intense winter men may carry within their own breasts, whatever be the season in external nature!

We have spoken of *resemblance*,—but observe one striking point of *difference*,—namely, the natural win-

ter will certainly and necessarily, from a regular and absolute cause, pass away, after a while ; not so, the spiritual winter. It is in the established nature of the thing, that the brighter, warmer season should return, with all its appropriate phenomena; we have only to wait and do nothing, and there is nothing we *can* do. It does not belong to the constitution of the human nature that the spiritual warmth and animation *must* come, *must* have a season. Look at dull apprehension,—cold affections,—torpid conscience,—unactuated will—*these* may continue so, through the ensuing spring and summer, forward to the next winter, and may resemble *that* winter more completely even than they resemble this ; analogous to material nature in this one point, that the longer the cold continues, the more intense it will become. It would be a melancholy kind of observation and comparison for a man to make, as the spring commences and advances, to compare the brightening and lengthening days with his spiritual views and intelligence ;—the evident progress, with his fixed and obdurate sameness;—the opening blossoms with his religious emotions, desires, aspirations, resolutions; the prevailing warmth at length, and full character of life, with the habitual temper of his heart;—or finally, to observe the precious and ripened produce, but the case with himself answering to those words, "the harvest is past, the summer is ended, and *we—I*—not saved!" All this *may* be; in numberless cases it *will* be. Shall it be so with *us*? But how else should it be with the man that carelessly lets it all alone? What a glorious thing on the other hand, if we should escape from our winter of the soul by an equal progress with that by which external nature will certainly escape!

We might follow out the analogy to a wider extent, applying it to the state of a religious society ;—of the great community of a nation, of the general human race. How glorious, when the probable import of that prophecy shall be realized, "*the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose!*"

We note one more point of analogy, the resemblance of winter to *old age*. The direct resemblances are too obvious to need illustration. Those in the earlier seasons of life, are sensible that they look on the aged as in life's winter. But whether they are disposed to entertain a wicked contempt, or a benevolent respect, let them never forget that they too are to come to that winter, unless prematurely cut off. Those who are now aged, were so admonished in their earlier seasons. The old age of the wise and good resembles the winter in one of its most favourable circumstances, that the former seasons improved have laid in a valuable store; and they have to bless God that disposed and enabled them to do so. But the most striking point in the comparison, after all, is one of unlikeness. Their winter has no spring to follow it—in this world. It is to close, not by an insensible progression into another season, but by a termination, absolute, abrupt, and final; a consideration which should shake and rouse the most inveterate insensibility of thoughtless old age. But the servants of God say, "*That* is well!" They would not make such a gradation into a spring of mortal existence, if it could be put in their choice. Their winter, they say, is quite the right time for a great transition. It was in nature's winter, or towards that season, that their Lord came to the earth; it was in the winter that he died for their redemption; and the winter of their life is the right time for them to die, that the redemption may be finished. And there is eternal spring before them! What will *they* not be contemplating of beauty and glory, while those who have yet many years on earth are seeing returning springs and summers!

The gloomy circumstance of winter on our globe, points to the desirableness of an abode where there shall be nothing like winter; or of a mode of existence quite superior to all elemental evils. The theory of such a condition of existence we cannot distinctly form in our minds; but so much the better; for that would imply such a resemblance to the present economy, as

one should be reluctant to admit. So much the better that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart been able to conceive the things that God hath prepared."

---

## V.

## SUPREME ATTACHMENT DUE TO SPIRITUAL OBJECTS.

"*Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.*"—How momentous a charge is it that is imposed in the injunction to dispose rightly of the affection of a human soul! A charge which we cannot at our choice take upon us, or decline, since we *have* the soul, and the charge is inseparable.

Sometimes we may have looked at some affair of a merely worldly nature, with self-gratulation that we were not obliged to undertake it. "It involves so much skill—such continual attention—such hazard—such sad consequences in the event of failure! happily the business is not mine." It were well that in such a case, the thought should occur; "But there may be a business of mine! Where have my affections been to-day? Where are they at this hour? Where have they been all my life? Where will they be if I let them alone?"

Affection is the going out of the soul in sentiments of interest, complacency, and desire, toward objects within its view. Love to self, indeed, is always said to be the primary and strongest affection of our nature; and truly. But then what is the manner of action of this self-love? It is not that the affection stays enclosed, acting in and upon our very self. The affection then is the going out of the soul.

Now, how happy were it if the case were thus with us; that the affection of the soul might go out just at its own pleasure, and all be right and safe. This is

supposing that a comprehensive, discriminating, and indeed infallible perception, accompanied necessarily all the goings out of affection; and also, that the moral taste of the soul always strictly agreed with its intellectual discernment; in short, that the soul possessed a grand moral instinct. The consequence would be, that all things affecting the soul, in the way of attracting it, would affect it right. Nothing would *attract* it which ought not; it would be in *repulsion* to all evil; and those things which did attract, and justly might, would do so in the right degrees and proportion so far, and no further; with so much force, and no more; and with an unlimited force that alone which is the supreme good. What a glorious condition this! And this *must* be the state of good men in a future world, else there would be temptation, trial, hazard, and the possibility of falling.

But what a dreadful contrast to all this is our present state! As one great circumstance, our nature, composed of two kinds of being, places us in strict relation to two quite different economies. It is true, the combination—the union of the two—does, in many respects, make them, to a wonderful degree, feel and act as one; but still it is no such union of the two kinds of being, as to combine perfectly into one harmonious interest the relations to the two economies. The man is not so one, his combined nature does not so act as one, as to reduce the two diverse classes of interests to one blended, inseparable order, so that each movement of the soul, with respect to either, should necessarily have due respect to both. No! the relations stand distinct, separate, and in a very great degree, foreign to each other. Therefore, there is great difficulty and hazard as to the apportioning of the regards to these classes respectively;—great difficulty of maintaining such a state and exercise of the affections, as should comprehend, in due order and proportion, both these great classes.

Another obvious and most important circumstance is, that by the one part of our nature, our relation to

the one class of interests is immediate and sensible; while our other grand relation, being to things far less palpable—to things spiritual, invisible, and as it were remote—is to be apprehended only through the medium of serious thought and faith. This is a circumstance of formidable omen, even under the best supposable condition of our nature thus compounded and situated. Even in that case, there would seem to be required a special unremitted divine influence to preserve it right. How should there *not* be a constant mighty *tendency* to a wrong preponderance!

But this is not all. Our nature is immeasurably far from being in that "best supposable state." Our nature is sunk into such a state, that it has a most mighty and obstinate tendency to give itself wholly to the inferior temporal class of its interests. In one act of its affection, and in the next, and in a hundred successively, its preference will go the inferior; and the effect of this tendency uncounteracted, is to throw the supreme interests, and the soul itself, away. This is a fearful predicament! One should imagine it could not be thought of without terror. One would imagine that the terror of it, if any reason or right feeling were left in man, would make the docrine of divine, transforming, assisting grace, to be welcomed with enthusiasm. Except in reliance on this, we should hear with utter despair the injunction, "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth."

This remains the sovereign duty, the comprehensive precept, to us sojourners on earth. Let us attend a few moments to the subject and application of this command—

In the first place;—an indiscreet language may have sometimes been used by pious men and teachers, not maintaining exactly a due regard to the *limitations* on the latter part of the precept; a language to the effect almost, of requiring an absolute entire indifference or contempt to all terrestrial things; insomuch, that the considerate reader or hearer has been saying within himself, "Now that is strictly impossi-

ble," or "absurd." According to this, there is an essential, insuperable inconsistency between our duty and the very condition in which God has placed us. Sometimes this language of excess has been a rather unthinking repetition of a kind of common-place; but often it has had a better origin, such as the retired, contemplative, devout life of some good men. The language of religion has had a particular advantage in this respect, when it has come from enlightened and pious men, who have had much to do in the world—for example, Matthew Hale. Or it may have had its origin in short occasional seasons of peculiarly elevated feeling; or in the state of feeling produced in good men by affliction, calamity, and persecution.

But it is disserviceable to religion thus to preach, as it were, an annihilation of our interests in this world. They have claims, and they will make them good in defiance, whether allowed or not. But these claims must be allowed. Think in how many ways we are made susceptible of pleasure and pain from "the things on the earth;" and to what an amount, in passing fifty, sixty, or seventy years upon it. Now we may surely believe that, fallen and guilty as we are, our Creator does not will the pleasure denied, or the pain endured, more than is inevitable to our mortal condition, or disciplinary toward our future life. And therefore we may, in regulated measure, desire the pleasing, and be anxious to avoid the painful.

But think how much interest, and attention, and care, are necessary to avoid the ills of this mortal life! How much concern and study must be applied directly to temporal things, in order that, on the whole, we may have the most benefit of our relations to this terrestrial scene. The particulars that might be specified will occur to every one. Health is deservedly an object of great interest and care. "*Affection*" is inevitably and justly "*set*" on it—and a person's near relatives in life—and then, as a matter concerning both himself and them, his temporal condition, in the plainest sense of that epithet; no small interest, that

is to say, "*affection*" is necessarily "*set*" on competence, especially in times when this is very difficult and precarious. As we have referred to the "times," we may add, that a man that looks on the conduct of public affairs, by which his own and his family's and his fellow citizens' welfare are deeply affected, will necessarily feel very considerable interest in that direction. He must "*set*" some "*affection*" on what he is convinced would be the best, or at least a better state of things. Again, if he is a man of cultivated intellect and taste, then he cannot avoid being interested in the beauties and wonders of nature, the great works of human intellect and genius, or the discoveries of science. Now in such points it is seen how intimate is our relation to this world. And in some proportion to the intimacy and the number of our relations to this world, will it inevitably be that "*affection*" must be "*set on things on the earth.*"

But, how striking and how sad it is here to consider that the relations to this present world are the only ones practically recognised by the far greater number of mankind! Think, if any religious instructor were to exhort them to such an utter disregard of their temporal interests, as they actually indulge respecting their eternal ones,—what madness would be charged! *A fortiori*, then, is not *theirs* an awful madness?

Let us turn to the other view of the subject; the higher class of our relations. By the nobler part of our nature we are placed in the most solemn relations to another economy. Not to have a deep sense of this fact, implies that something is enormously wrong. This immortal spirit was appointed but for a few years to this earth; but eternally to another state. And it is placed in relations comporting with its eternity of existence;—to God, the one infinite Being—the one sole, perfect, and independent Essence;—to the Redeemer, the Lord, and the life of the new economy;—to an unseen state;—to an order of exalted, holy, and happy beings in that state; to a pure, ex-

alted, and endless felicity in that state. And do I give, in conformity to one law of my nature, a great measure of my affection to the things to which I have a subordinate temporary relation, and refuse affection towards those to which I have an eternal relation? How marvellous and how lamentable, that the soul can consent to stay in the dust, when invited above the stars; having in its own experience the demonstration that this is not its world; knowing that even if it were, the possession will soon cease; and having a glorious revelation and a continual loud call from above!

But it is on the duty as considered not absolutely, but comparatively, of setting the affection "*above*," that we would insist. What should be the comparative state of the affections, as towards the one and the other? And what can the answer be but, plainly and briefly, that there must be at the lowest account a decided preponderance in favour of spiritual and eternal things? At the lowest state of the case, we repeat, for alas! this is but little to say for the feeling towards things so contrasted, so immensely different in value! This is the lowest ground on which a man can justly deem himself a Christian. For how is the great object of Christ at all accomplished in a man whose preference is not gained to those things to which Christ came to redeem men? And consider! if no more than barely this is attained, how often this itself is likely to be put in doubt. On all accounts, therefore, how clearly it is a duty and an interest to aspire to every attainable degree beyond a mere positive preponderance. We may even assert that this aspiration is an indispensable sign or symptom.

This may lead to the question,—What may be safely taken as indications, or proofs, that there is the required preponderance? Now in most cases of comparison and preference, a man has no need to seek or think about the evidence of his preference; it is a matter of prompt and unequivocal consciousness. And if in any case in the universe, it should be

so here! How happy to have it thus! But, even with good men, the case is not always such, far from it! as to make a reference to tests and proofs unnecessary or useless. There is to be nothing mysterious in the matter and operation of these tests;—nothing like the Urim and Thummim;—nothing like the ordeals;—it is an affair of plain, serious, faithful thought.

For example, let a man take the occasion to examine, when he is very strongly interested by some one temporal object or concern, whether he can say, more than all this is the interest I feel in "the things that are above." When he is greatly pleased with some temporal possession, or success, or prospect, and his thoughts suddenly turn to the higher objects, is he then decidedly more pleased? or does he feel a deep and earnest solicitude that this temporal good may not injure him in his higher interests? If he suffers or apprehends something very grievous as to his temporal interests, does he deliberately feel that he would far rather suffer so than in his spiritual interests? Or again, in such a case, does he feel a strong overbalancing consolation from "things above?" Is he more pleased to give the earnest application of his mind to the higher objects and interests than to any inferior ones? As a man digging in the confidence he should find gold, would labour with more soul and spirit than one raising stones or planting trees. Does he feel that, on the whole, he would do more, or sacrifice more, for the one than for the other? While greatly interested in a temporal pursuit, does he habitually charge it upon his soul, and actually endeavour, that he do with still greater intenseness prosecute a higher object? If he perceives that his pursuit of a temporal object is beginning to outrun his pursuit of the nobler, does he solemnly intermit, in order that this may not be the case? "How vigorously I am pursuing this—but what is that which I am leaving behind? If I leave that behind, it will stay! It will run no race with a worldly spirit. Let me instantly draw in!"

Is he constantly, or very often, impelled to the divine throne to implore grace and strength that there may be a decided preponderance? the witness for him "above" that there is that proof at least of his affections there? If by the advance of life, he is sensible that he is fast going out of the "things on the earth," does he rise above all regret at this, in the view of the sublimer objects? "Do you compassionate me because I am growing old—because I cannot stay long here? You mistake! Yonder is the scene to which I am animated in approaching." We will only add, —in his occupation and transactions with the "things on the earth," has he acquired the habit of imparting even to those concerns a principle and a reference still bearing toward the higher objects?—Such questions as these would be the points for placing and keeping the subject in a state of trial and proof; would be an admonition, too, of the necessity of applying all the force in the higher direction.

Now, how happy to be in such a state of decided preference in the devotement of the affections! Happy! considering that to those higher things we are in a constant, permanent relation; whereas our relation to the terrestrial is varying and transient. Reflect, how many things on the earth we have been in relation to, but are no longer, and shall be no more. Happy! because a right state of the affections toward the superior objects, is the sole security for our having the greatest benefit of those on earth. For that which is the best in the inferior, is exactly that which may contribute to the higher; and that will never be found but by him who is intent on the higher. Happy! because every step of the progress which we must make in leaving the one, is an advance toward a blessed and eternal conjunction with the other. Then, that circumstance of transcendent happiness, that in the superior state of good men there will be no contrary attractions, no diverse and opposed relations to put their choice and their souls in difficulty or peril!

## VI.

### SPIRITUAL FREEDOM PRODUCED BY KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRUTH.

"*The truth shall make you free.*"—You recollect the reception given to this declaration of our Lord, and the reply, "We were never in bondage to any man." The Jews did not take his words in the sense he meant;—but let the sentence be taken in their own sense, and a more absurd reaction of pride is not easy to be imagined—"Were never in bondage to any man!" What! had they not the Roman governor, with a division of the imperial guards in their metropolis? They retained, indeed, a little of the show of a monarchy,—a king by sufferance, over a people tributary to a foreign power; but of so little account was this government of their own, that in the arraignment of our Lord, his claim to be "King of the Jews," was alleged, not as in contravention to the rights of Herod, but of Cæsar.

But our Lord was speaking of a far different kind of bondage and emancipation; a matter affecting all mankind, after all the Cæsars are dead, and the Roman empire is fallen. And in this far more important view of men's condition, it is striking to observe how much pride of freedom there may be amidst the profoundest slavery. This is exemplified in multitudes of the citizens of any state politically free; they shall be seen exhibiting a proud consciousness of this privilege, each one is lord of himself, with the utmost contempt and scorn of the people of those nations where all are subject to the will of one or a few. Now very far be it from us to undervalue political liberty—a right of human nature, a thing without which no people can ever rise high in wisdom, virtue, and happiness. But at the same time, contemplate in another light, any such free nation existing, or that ever did exist,—how many of the people elated with this proud distinction,

stand exposed to your view as *slaves*, in a sense they little think of! Many in subjection to their appetites; many to the most foolish, many to the most vicious passions. Now to them, what an inconsiderable good is their political liberty, as compared with the evil of this slavery! and yet, amidst it all, there is the self-complacency, the pride, the boasting of freedom!

Take another exemplification. A high-spirited man in very independent circumstances, with confidence and self-sufficiency conspicuous on his front; in numberless cases he can and will do as he pleases; he has the means of commanding deference and obsequiousness, defies and spurns interference and opposition; and says "I am free!" For all this, perhaps, he is but the stronger slave. All the while, his whole mind and moral being may be utterly servile to some evil passion, some corrupt purpose, some vain interest, some tyrannic habit.

We might specify one more exemplification, the pride of free-thinking, carried to the extent of rejecting revealed religion. Here, indeed, the man will perhaps say that he verifies the text; *the truth* has made him free; he has quite impartially and in the soundest exercise of reason, satisfied himself that there is no divine revelation, and that there wanted none; that that which claims to be acknowledged such, and the whole history concerning it, are a most wicked imposition on mankind; that the recorded miracles are a fabrication of lies; that the little good there is mixed up in the imposture, was well-known or attainable without it; that the judgment to come, and heaven and hell, are idle fictions; that immortality, and indeed a future state at all, are matters of such mere conjecture and so like poetical fancies, as not to be worth seriously taking into calculation in the scheme of this short life; and a hundred other things his reason has achieved. And upon this, he has a proud sense of freedom from vulgar delusion! Now a Christian judges all this to be a most signal prostration and slavery of the man's reason. Allow him to say, "I am free;" yet we

might turn upon him and say, "Nay, but are you free, in your own sense? have you never any dread of being left alone to your own reflections? have you never any dark and terrifying intimations speaking to your soul? if you happened to be reminded of the solemn dying expressions of a parent or friend are you 'free?' If you hear of or witness the last scene of one of the same class of *freemen* dying with inexpressible horror, are you 'free?' If any illness should attack yourself, and suggest the alarming idea of death, are you 'free?' No; you are in reality not 'made free;' even in your own sense. But even supposing that you were, it would in another sense be but slavery. You would be surrendered, as if bound hand and foot, to all that is most pernicious to man. You would be just so much the more at the command of every temptation to sin; just so much the more completely a slave to any favorite vice; perpaps most destructive of present welfare. You would be just so much more at the mercy and the sport of the frivolous and profligate. This is your proud freedom!" Thus the most wretched of slaves are beguiled by the self-assurance of being free!

A grand primary thing that truth has to do in this world is, to expose to men their real situations as enslaved. If both for this preliminary work, and for the whole great process of breaking up the bondage of the human spirit, truth, or "the truth," be the proper agent or instrument, what an immense work there is for it to do! For are we not surrounded by a world of slaves? applying the term in the intellectual, moral, and religious sense. If we asked it in the political sense, the question would be its own obvious answer; but we are using it in the sense in which it expresses a much greater calamity.

The mass of mankind are enslaved. The cool, sagacious, philosophic observer thinks so.—The devout Christian observer thinks so.—The illuminated dying estimator thinks so. And all the real friends of our race would unite to implore that the truth might come

to perform its mighty work; or, in other words, that the glorious Agent of human deliverance, the Son of God would come and accomplish that work by means of "the truth."

But why is truth so peculiarly the thing to work the deliverance from that tyranny by which the spirits of men are held enslaved? Evidently because a very material part of the strength of that which enslaves them, consists in ignorance and error, to which truth is the opposite. If we would form a notion quite comprehensive of what may be regarded as placing and keeping men's minds in an enslaved state, we should include ignorance and all error through which they receive injury, together with all perversion in the passions, and all that perverts them. Now against all this in its full breadth, truth, universal truth, is opposed; and the effectual application of truth would counteract and reverse it all.

Our Lord was speaking of what *divine* truth would do; and especially the *evangelic* part of it. It would make them free in those points wherein their bondage is their greatest calamity.

Previously to adverting to a few of those most important points, we observe, that there are some things wherein the truth merely, the truth simply admitted in the understanding, goes far towards effecting the emancipation; things where the *chief* strength of the enslavement is in a delusion on the judgment. Some such things have happily left us, as a nation, in a great measure free. It would not be impertinent to specify here, for it was an evil bearing mischievously on religion, that faith in *judicial astrology*, which bound and oppressed the minds of many of our ancestors. It interfered fatally with the right notions and feelings respecting the government of divine providence, yet held a strong and gloomy dominion in multitudes of minds, in ages not far remote; and not the vulgar only, but some of the thinking and learned, and even some that professed to revere the true religion. Now this gloomy tyranny had nearly its whole

strength in the belief of its slaves, and therefore could not survive the belief, that the heavenly bodies had a power of good and evil over human affairs; and therefore, under the operation of increasing general knowledge, and of direct science, it has been annihilated.

We may add another example in idolatry, in its grosser forms. Let men simply admit into their understandings the truth that the objects in surrounding nature, or the figures themselves have made of metal, stone, wood, or clay, are no gods, and there is an end of the idolatry! It may at the same time be the fact, that even this simple intellectual conviction has seldom been effected but through the intervention of the true religion. In the case again of the popish superstitions, let the mere truth become apparent to men's understanding, let them become convinced in opinion that such and such practices are erroneous, and they will so far be "made free."

It is very true with respect to such things as have been here specified, that it was a matter of very great and tedious difficulty to obtain the admission of the truth into men's understandings. So implicated and combined had the delusions become with their passions, habits, interests, and institutions. But still, as soon as the truth really was admitted, the thing was done. It is true enough that these forms of tyranny under which men's minds have been enslaved, came to attain their dominion over the understanding through an operation on the passions, interests, or fancy, while the reason was dark, feeble, and submissive. But they could never have established their dominion without beguiling the judgment, without possessing themselves of the reason of man, such as it was, and after *it* was unbeguiled, these things had not in them that which could still and, by another power, hold the mind a slave.

But though men's minds should, through the power of truth, enjoy a full freedom from all such modes of slavery as these, there are other ways in which it may be most deplorably held in chains. What is it but a

sad captivity, if there be something that fixes the soul in alienation from God? And even thus it is, by the corrupt state of our nature. The Bible says so, a hundred times over; but if it did not, there is the evident matter of fact. The mind naturally does not love God. It does not love to think of him; it turns away from the unwelcome subject; it does not love to perceive and acknowledge his presence in all places and times. It does not seek communication with him. It does not find nor seek its happiness in pleasing him. It revolts from his will and commands. It has not the least wish to go to a world, where it might have a fuller manifestation of him, and be more intimately in communion with him. But all this would be the glorious going out, if we may so express it, of the soul toward its supreme good; toward its perfection; its noblest exercise, its divinest felicity, the verification of its liberty! But then there is something that malignantly holds it back, and presses and degrades it down. What a dreadful bondage is that! How inexpressibly desirable is something to "make it free!" It is "the truth" that must "make it free."

But here the case is not as in those forms of mental bondage we specified before. The truth merely admitted in the understanding, however distinctly and decidedly, will not suffice. Without it, certainly, nothing can be done, but alone it will leave the great work uneffected. The truth appropriate to the purpose must be that God is transcendently worthy of all love and devotion—the infinite perfection of all excellencies united—and that it is the happiness, as well as duty of his rational creatures, to be devoted to him in adoration, affection, and willing obedience. Well! these truths may be presented to the understanding with luminous evidence; it may see that the evidence is decisive, and that is to admit conviction. But still, the moral part of the soul, the affections, the will, may not come into the assent; the moral part is held still under a malignant and adverse dominion; the soul therefore is not "made free." Here is the grand and

urgent occasion for the Spirit of God to work,—to transfuse a new and redeeming principle through the moral being, and then the man is free! The freed spirit feels that a hateful, direful enchantment is broken, and flies to its God.

The love of sin is a miserable and dreadful enslavement. Suppose a man bound by some strong coercion in a servile connection with a malignant but specious lord who sets him to one occupation and another, with a mockery of making it delightful at first, but still turning it into painful drudgery: showing him dainties, letting him taste and then snatching them away, or mingling something bitter and nauseous; smiling and acting the villain; overruling and frustrating him in any design or attempt at escape; subjecting him to still greater grievances the longer he remains; and at length reducing him to utter degradation and contempt! This is but a faint simile for the slavery of sin. It *is* a wretched bondage. It lets not the man have any command of himself. It pleases him, but as by way of holding him fast to plague him. And after it pleases him less, through loss of novelty and a less lively relish, it seems to retain a still firmer hold of him. How much of "the truth" is forced on him by his own wretched experience, in vain! Still "the truth" is the grand mean for his rescue. But not the mere dry admission of it in his understanding; for that may be, and his chains be on him still. He may, in this sense, "hold the truth in unrighteousness." There must be the agency of the Spirit of God, making an irresistible application of the truth, making it go through all his moral being; creating an aversion to the very nature of sin, as well as a horror of its consequences; and then what a glorious emancipation! To behold the legion of the former tyrants prostrate, and the chief monster, the great besetting sin, as if struck with heaven's lightning!

We might name the predominant love of this world. It were endless to dilate on this, regarded in the light

of a sad slavery; and why so, but that the proofs and modes are endless? But take the plain comprehensive idea, an immortal spirit so set upon that which can be nothing to it longer than the lapse of a few fleeting years, as to disregard and lose the happiness of eternity! In this there is so much truth habitually trifled with, that the liberation is a most mighty work for the truth to accomplish. It is for the Divine Spirit to present and keep the two objects manifest before the mind in their stupendous contrast, and at the same time to impart a new principle of preference; without this latter, the mind would only be overpowered by that contrast; its real taste might remain the same.

One other form of bondage for the truth to deliver from, is often spoken of in the New Testament, namely, that which some thoughtful, conscientious, anxious minds suffer, in not having come clearly off from the ground of the divine law as that of their acceptance with God. They attribute great importance and value, and some undefined degree of efficacy, to both the sacrifice and the righteousness of Christ. But still as God's government and judgment are constituted upon his perfect and eternal law, *that* continually comes in upon them, and presents its menaces and its terrors—and well might they be terrified, even to utter despair, if this were the ground of their acceptance with God. But here comes in the evangelic truth which declares us totally removed off this ground for justification and salvation, because on *it* salvation is plainly and absolutely impossible. "The truth" declares a new and extraordinary economy, in which it is appointed that the Mediator's merit is all-sufficient and alone. And this is to be laid hold of, and relied upon by faith; thus a glorious freedom will be effected.

There is the bondage of the fear of death. This bondage needs no illustration. Look at the general feelings of mankind; let each reflect on his own! But imagine these feelings substantially reversed. Is not that a sublime freedom? The Christian truth and He that brought it from heaven, came to confer

this freedom. Combine in thought all these kinds of freedom, and think whether we shall be content to live in miserable captivity! Think whether it be possible for our being to be thrown more completely away, than by a stupid indifference or a protracted delay in regard to the attainment of so divine a deliverance!

---

## VII.

### CHRIST, THOUGH INVISIBLE, THE OBJECT OF DEVOUT AFFECTION.

"*Whom having not seen ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.*"—It is familiar to all experience and observation how much the action of our spiritual nature is dependent on the senses; especially how much the power of objects to interest the affections, depends on their being objects of sight. The affections often seem reluctant to admit objects to their internal communion, except through the avenues of the senses. The objects must be, as it were, authenticated by the senses, must first occupy and please them, —or they are regarded by the inner faculties as something strange, foreign, out of our sympathies,— or unreal.

Sometimes a philosophic spirit, proudly aspiring to a refined power of abstraction and speculation, is indignant that it should be so dependent for its objects of interest, and its emotions, on the senses. It earnestly essays to create, as it were, within itself, an order of realities of its own. A Christian mind also, from a far better principle, is often grieved and indignant that the objects of the senses so much more readily obtain favour and power within it, than the objects of its in-

tellectual apprehension;—that it is so much more easy to walk by sight than by faith. It is a worthy and noble strife of a Christian spirit to attain a more vital and affecting communion with things invisible.

At the same time, it is of necessity that we must yield in a measure to the effect of the constitution of our nature. By that constitution, the objects of sense,—the things especially that are seen, have some evident and important advantages for engaging our affections, over the other class of objects. Let us specify a few. The objects which we can see, give a more positive and direct impression of reality; there can be no dubious surmise whether they exist or not. The sense of their presence is more absolute. When an object is seen before me, or beside me, I am instantly in all the relations of being present; I cannot feel and act as if no such object were there; I cannot by an act of my mind put it away from me. Objects seen,—may have very striking qualities simply as objects of sight; they may have visible splendour, or beauty, which strike and please independently of any thinking. Here therefore is a class of qualities of great power to interest us, which the objects of mere belief, of faith, have nothing to set against.

The good or evil, pleasure or grievance, which the visible objects cause to us, are often immediate; they are now; without any anticipation I am pleased, benefitted,—or perhaps distressed. Whereas the objects of faith can be regarded as to have their effect upon us in futurity. They have really very much of this prospective character; but we thoughtlessly make it much more exclusively such than it is.

Visible objects, when they have been seen, can be clearly kept in mind in absence;—during long periods—at the greatest distance. We can revert to the time when they were seen. We can have a lively image; seem to be looking at it still. But the great objects of faith having never been seen, the mind has no express type to revert to. The idea of them is to be still again and again formed anew; fluctuates and

varies;—is brighter and dimmer;—alternates as between substance and shadow.

With visible objects, speaking of intelligent beings, we can have a sensible and definite communication. We are evidently in one another's society; look and are looked upon; speak and are heard and answered; it is a positive reciprocation, and each feels that it is so. Invisible beings do not afford us this perfect sense of communication. We may think that we are seen and heard, but there are no signs of recognition.

With visible beings, that is, with *human* beings, we have the sense of equality, of one kind; we are of the same nature and economy; in the same general condition of humanity and mortality. But as to the unseen existences, we are altogether out of their order. There is an unlikeness and a disparity immeasurable and unknown. We know not the manner of their dwelling in the creation; in what manner they may be near us; what their perceptions and estimates of us may be; what intelligence, what powers they possess; and we have no power that can affect them; we cannot benefit or hurt them; they are totally separate, and infinitely independent.

With the visible beings, we can have a certain sense of appropriation; can obtain an interest in them which they will acknowledge. What they are is partly for me, partly mine, "this is my relative; this is my friend, my benefactor;" or, "this has a kind regard for me, as being his friend, benefactor," &c. But the invisible beings! they have a high relationship of their own!—They stand aloof, and far outside of the circle within which we could comprehend what we can call ours. What could we do to arrest their sympathies? We have nothing to offer to draw them into the bands of friendship. They are not to be for our sakes imprisoned in this dark, and mortal, and sinful corner of the creation.

We want some good from objects, whether seen or invisible. The object,—the person—seen, is presented to us under this advantage, while we are looking

for the benefit from him, that we can perceive him performing or preparing the good for us. We hear him promise; see him take measures; observe him active. We see that he aims, devises, exerts his power,—see how there is a process to accomplish the good we wish. But if an invisible agent is to employ himself for our welfare, it is by an unseen process and means. We must wait and expect, receiving no palpable intimation; perceiving no distinct action, no reply to inquiry, no assurance as to time, no certification,—except through faith—that the unseen benefactor has not turned all his attention away to another part of the universe.

Such are some of the advantages of converse with objects that are seen, over that with the invisible. In this view taken exclusively, it was a high privilege that was enjoyed by those who saw and conversed with our Lord on earth. "Behold the Lamb of God!" "We have seen with our eyes, and our hands have handled of the Word of life." It may have often occurred to most persons to imagine what a signal advantage that must have been; especially in the point of feeling the affections irresistibly drawn and devoted to him. To have been personally in the presence, the society of a being believed to be the Saviour of the world; to have reflected, "here in this visible form, are embodied the mercy, the sanctity, the wisdom, and the power, of heaven!" To have looked on his countenance to descry some mystic characters, intimating the indwelling glory! To have met the rays of divine benignity in his look, and have felt as if they shed light and life into the very soul! To have heard him pronounce revelations of truth which the reason of mortals could never reach, intermingled with every sign of gentleness, compassion, and yet authority! To have been present at many of his mighty operations of power and mercy! To have witnessed the last affecting and amazing scenes of his presence on earth! The persuasion is, that there must have been irresistible captivation; that every source of af-

fection in the soul would have opened, and the heart devoted to such an object for ever! In a manner parallel, though so inferior in degree, a powerful influence on the affections and passions may be imagined as inevitable, if we could have beheld the most illustrious of the prophets or apostles, as Moses, Elijah, Daniel, Paul. On the view of the matter thus far, we might be apt to feel, as if an immense advantage had been lost to us, for the means of commanding our affections to the best object, in our not having seen, and not being permitted to see, the personal manifestations of Christ.

But this is only one side of the subject. Look a moment at the other—and we need not fear to assert, —that on the whole it is a high advantage *not* to have seen Jesus Christ; an advantage in favour of the affections claimed to be devoted to him.

We need not dwell on the possibility of feeling a great interest in objects we have never beheld. Recollect what a measure of sentiment, of affection in its various modes, has been given to the illustrious personages of history; the glowing admiration in contemplating, as there displayed, heroes, deliverers of their country, avengers of oppression, and men of transcendent intellectual power. A softer emotion, but a warm one, has been excited at the view,—the imaginary sight,—of the examples of consummate virtue, such as was not displayed in tumult and conflict; philanthropists, who exhausted their lives in alleviating distress; men of inflexible conscience and integrity, even to the death; examples of suffering innocence, persons of signal piety, who lived as on the verge of heaven,—and had not in spirit far to go when they died. Think! what a captivation you have felt in beholding them, in thought; how the spirit has struggled, as it were, to place itself in their company! The mere imaginary beings of poetry and fiction have often laid mighty hold of the heart. It has accepted them as affecting realities, despite of the understanding, which knew they never existed, which hardly be-

lieved that such things could exist; and some of them will retain their place and favour in the mind as long as we live. All this shows the possibility of giving an animated affection to objects that never appeared to us in visible reality.

But there is a nobler manifestation of this possibility. Think of all the affection of human hearts that has been given to the Saviour of the world, since he withdrew his visible presence from it! He has appeared to no eye of man since the apostles; but millions have loved him with a fervency which nothing could extinguish, in life or death. Think of the great "army" of those who have suffered death for this love, and have cherished it in death! A mightier number still would have died for it, and with it, if summoned to do so. Think of all those who, in the excitement and inspiration of this love, have indefatigably laboured to promote the glory of its great object!—and the innumerable mulitude of those who, though less prominently distinguished, have felt this sacred sentiment living in the soul, as the principle of its best life, and the source of all its immortal hopes! This is a splendid fact in the history of our race, a glorious exception to the vast and fatal expenditure of human affection on unworthy and merely visible things. So grand a tribute of the soul has been redeemed to be given to the Redeemer, though an object unseen!

It is to the advantage of the affection of his disciples toward him, that they see him not. It may be recollected that a special benediction is pronounced by our Lord himself, on the faith that operates to produce this love. "Blessed are they that have *not* seen and yet believed." But more than this; revert in thought to the personal manifestation of our Lord on earth,—and consider how it would act on the believing spectator's mind. Sublime greatness would, must, by an inevitable law of human feeling, be reduced, shaded, diminished, as to its impression on the mind, by being shrouded and presented in a mere human form. Even when the intellect recognized a superhuman glory

dwelling there "the fulness of the Godhead bodily" there is yet such an obstinate control of the senses over the mind's apprehension, that the sight of a mere common human form would, absolutely, in a degree, contract, depress, and prostrate that apprehension. Has it not struck your thoughts, that, to observe the shape, features, limbs, and ordinary action of that, must have made an impression which would be in counter-action to the impressions of majesty?

Consider also, that, in beholding a glorious and divine nature in such a manifestation, the affection of those devoted to him would fix very much, often chiefly, on the mere human quality of the being before them, and therefore, would be familiarized, shall we say vulgarized, down to that proportion; it might be most warm and cordial, but not elevated and awful. In fact, our Lord had sometimes to admonish and deter his affectionate friends from an assumption inconsiderately ventured by them on the ground of his humiliated appearance. They appear sometimes in a perplexity of feeling between his plain, humble humanity, and that mysterious glory which at intervals lightened upon them from within. Perhaps the chief design of the transfiguration was to correct and raise their low ideas of him.

Consider besides, that, under the full direct impression of sight, there would be a great restriction on faith, acting in the way of imagination. The mind does not know how to expand into splendid ideal conception upon an object presented close, and plain, and familiar, to sight.

Should not such considerations make it evident, that to see the Messiah in his personal manifestation, was a mode of contemplating him very inferior, for the excitement of the sublimer kind of affection, to that which we have to exercise by faith? It is true, that to those who regard him as nothing more than a man, all this will appear impertinent and fantastic. But those who solemnly believe their salvation to depend on his being infinitely more, will feel the importance

of all that gives scope to their faculties for magnifying the idea of their Redeemer. This scope is the greater for our "not having seen;" since,—our conceptions are not reduced and confined down to a precise image of human personality,—a particular, individual, graphical form, which would be always present to the mind's eye, in every meditation on the exalted Redeemer.

We have no exact and invariable image, placing him before us as a person that we know; exhibiting him in the mere ordinary predicament of humanity. It does invincibly appear to me, that this would be a depressive circumstance in solemn and elevated contemplations. We are not informed how this circumstance *did* operate in the minds of the apostles, who had seen him. It would have been interesting to know in what manner, and with what effect, the precise and familiar image mingled with their their lofty and magnificent thoughts of him. But it is clearly better to be left, as we are, to an indistinct and shadowy conception of the person of our Saviour as seen on earth. For thus we can with somewhat the more facility give our thoughts an unlimited enlargement in contemplating his sublime character and nature. Thus also we are left at greater freedom in the effort to form some grand, though glimmering, idea of him as possessing a glorious body, assumed after his victory over death. Our freedom of thought is the more entire for arraying the exalted Mediator in every glory which speculation, imagination, devotion, can combine, to shadow forth the magnificence of such an adored object.

Do not let it seem as if such a train of thought were like being ashamed of the humiliation of our Lord! We cannot be ashamed to see our humble nature so honoured as by his assuming even its inferior part. We cannot be ashamed to see such an illustration of the value set on our souls, as that he, the Judge of their value, would descend from heaven to assume a body to redeem them.

But it *is* important that our conceptions of him should but little rest on the level, if we may so speak, of his state of humiliation. In the Scriptures, besides the doctrine of his divinity, there is much in the character of the imagery by which he is represented, to demand an elevation in our ideas of his personal glory. For example, the manner in which he appears in the visions of Daniel; the fact of the transfiguration; the overpowering lustre in his manifestation to Paul; and the transcendent images in the visions of John. It is clearly intended that our predominant idea should not be humble and familiar. We must think that, in this respect, there is a very serious fault, —an unintentional impiety,—in many of our popular devotional writings, even in such as are designed and used for public worship. Such, we think, is the advantage, to later Christians, of not having seen their Lord in a mortal form.

We not only have not seen him, but we live very long after the time in which he could be seen; we, therefore, in endeavouring to form a sublime conception of him, can add, and accumulate upon the idea, all the glory that has arisen to him from the progress of his cause in the world ever since. So many mighty interpositions;—conquests gained;—strongholds of darkness demolished;—such a multitude of sinful immortal spirits redeemed,—devoted to him on earth, and now triumphing with him in heaven;—all this is become an added radiance around the idea of HIM!

Such is the object of Christian faith. As such an exalted being, he is to be believed on unseen. "In whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing,"—that is, holding a most firm assurance that such he is, and regarding him with an earnest interest as such a Redeemer. Then an inseparable result or associate of that faith, is to "love" him, though unseen; to give the soul's affection to him; to think of him with complacency and gratitude; to think of him as what it were death to want; to devote the soul to him as possessing the supreme excellence that deserves this devotement, and as having done that for us that demands it.

Then, through this faith and love, there will be "joy." "Ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." Most rationally such believers rejoice, because so believing and loving, they have a present, direct access to where he maintains, though unseen, the exercise of his mediatorial power. They believe all that is promised by him, and in his name. They have the sense, the assurance, of a sacred union with him, which involves an ultimate participation of his glory and joy. They consider him as actually preparing for them the felicity of another state,—and as conducting and training them toward it. They can sometimes imagine somewhat of that felicity—and how can they imagine it as to be theirs, and not rejoice?—And inasmuch as these anticipations are of something unseen, unrealized, and indefinitely great, the "joy" is corespondent; it is "unspeakable," in this sense, that it is not restricted, not limited to a precise measure, but expansive,—mingled with the sense of mystery. It aspires to be commensurate with unknown possibilities, and so is "unspeakable," as well as in its emphasis. The soul of man, if not sunk and stupified in the earth, aspires for ever to a joy having this quality, that is, undefinable, not reducible to exact and competent expression, that goes beyond all assigned limits and calculation.

See in all this, how the joy of Christians—the only persons entitled to rejoice on earth—is both in its sentiment and its causes, combined with, founded upon, *a recognition of Christ.*

On the supposition of our Lord's being merely a human person, however exalted in prophetic office, no language expressive of the sentiments and emotions regarding him could be more absurdly extravagant, more unworthy of apostolic seriousness and wisdom, than such expressions as those of the text; to which, nevertheless, there are very many throughout the New Testament that correspond. On this hypothesis, no men ever wrote or spoke in a strain of more inflated fanaticism, than they who were commissioned to illuminate the world!

## VIII

### FALLACIES OPERATING AGAINST EARNESTNESS IN RELIGION.

"*I would thou wert cold or hot.*"—These words occur in the austere and warning address to the church at Laodicea. The sentence which comes after is equally well remembered. "Because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth;" which may suggest this observation,—that the Supreme Teacher, in the sacred Scriptures, did not subject himself to consult any niceties of literary refinement. The Bible shows numerous instances of metaphors and illustrations, of a character very homely, unpolished, and sometimes even repulsive. If we should say that in part this was a mere conformity to the manner of the ages and places in which the divine oracles were uttered,—it would still not the less be true,—that it was not for the divine Dictator of truth and law to recognize the claim of any artificial order of human feelings and modes; or any rules but that of plain truth, because God was to speak to man in his own absolute character of Creator and Sovereign Dictator;—and to man in man's permament substantial character of creature and subject, with an understanding and a conscience to be spoken to;—and this was a relation superior to all artificial rules of men's communications with one another. God therefore would speak to man directly as a creature standing before HIM, and not as if he were regarding man as a creature placed in refined society, and to be addressed in a language modified according to its rules; and as if he were considerate of the creature's dignity and taste. Some of the more trivial of the infidel tribe have attempted on this account to detract from the venerableness and sanctity of the Bible, talking about its dealing in coarse language and images. As well might the vain spirits

in the prophets' times have affected to be shocked that Elijah would not put on a court dress when he had to appear in the name of the Almighty before kings, and queens, and princes; or that John the Baptist came in so coarse a garb to preach repentance, and announce the kingdom of God. Yet after all this, it is a perfectly obvious fact, that the Scriptures do abound with every kind of beauty and sublimity in sentiments, images, and language. As in the case of Elijah, there was his rough mantle, but also the chariot and horses of fire. But then it is most remarkably characteristic of the sacred writings, that these beauties seem to come with no manner of design to please the taste and fancy; they appear as most simply spontaneous from the subject.

"I would thou wert cold or hot." This is a condemnation of carelessness and indifference. The terms do not exactly imply an *entire* absence of every feeling excited by the religion of which they had taken the name. But then would it have been better than having so little, to have had absolutely none? In two respects it would. There would have been less of the means of self-deception. "Thou sayest I am rich and increased in goods, and have need of nothing." All semblance and pretension to Christianity being abjured, there would have been less injury done to it in the opinions and feelings of the irreligious world.

Without wishing to adjust any special question, we take the expression simply as a most impressive and menacing condemnation of insensibility, and indifference, and neglect respecting the one most important matter in existence, and as coming directly from our merciful Lord and Redeemer. The subject, therefore, on which we invite you to think a few moments, is the most common, and plain, and beaten of all subjects almost that we can speak or hear of; *the absolute necessity of being* IN EARNEST *about our highest interests.*

Considerations to enforce this great point, may be inculcated on those who are quite unconcerned; but

especially on those who feel in some, but an inefficient degree, its importance. Such a topic has great difficulty to lay any hold on the mind—almost even to engage the attention. We all know the effect of perfect familiarity and endless reiteration. But more; this great familiar truth seems to suffer in its power of interesting men by the very fulness of its evidence, and of the conviction with which it is admitted. With the greatest number of the moderately instructed and sober part of society, this great practical truth has a settled admission and establishment in the judgment. It is instantly acknowledged, almost before the sentence can be finished. "Certainly—certainly; we know all that; it is an undeniable truth." It has its place there, without opposition, question, or doubt. Is it not a most momentous, and mighty, and urgent truth? But by this ready, assenting, unresisting admission, its power seems to be destroyed. So that it is like a giant warrior, with his arms, conveyed dead into a cemetery, instead of being introduced living into a field of battle. Think of this fact! The evidence and admission so full, that the mind has *nothing* to do with it as a *question*, and *therefore* feels as if it had *little* to do with it as an *interest!* While its being a matter of the mightiest interest, is the very thing that is affirmed and acknowledged! Just as if for the irresistible occupancy of the judgment by a solemn truth, the perverse soul would take its revenge, by withdrawing away the affections and passions from all conjunction or communication with it. Like the policy of clearing away all the sustenance of life and action from the neighbourhood of a position which is impregnably occupied by an unwelcome power, to debilitate him by famine. Whatever be the explanation, the fact is evident that the actual power of this great principle or truth, *the absolute necessity of being* IN EARNEST *about our highest interest*, seems to be repressed and quelled, in consequence of the ready and complete acknowledgement it obtains in the mind. It seems to go to sleep there, because it holds its place certainly,—is not contradic-

ted,—and cannot be expelled. If some serious doubts could be raised upon it, they might make the matter interesting,—they might turn and fix thought upon it. But there is no question about it, and therefore men never think of it. We might compare this listless admission of truth to the kind of inanimate aspect of the scene under the full meridian sunshine, in summer, as contrasted with the shadows and other effects of dawn, evening, &c. The monition applied is frustrated; the mind giving a dull reply from within, that "all *that* is perfectly true and acknowledged." But should not the mind sometimes turn upon itself and say with wonder, "Is it really a fact that I do admit and acknowledge all this?"

Perhaps another thing that causes this general solemn admonition to be in earnest about our highest interests, to come with less force, is the circumstance that it is applicable and pertinent to ALL. It concerns *me*, not more than all these millions. Its absolute importance, as applicable to any *one*, seems dissipated in the idea how *many* it is applicable to. There is some unthinking feeling, as if the authority and importance of the one great admonition were divided into innumerable diminutive shares, with but inconsiderable force in each, at least in *mine*. How kindly and humbly each is willing not to account his soul more important than that of any of his fellow mortals! Yet not so benevolent, in another view of the matter; for in a certain indistinct way, he is laying the blame on the rest of mankind, if *he* is indifferent about his own highest interest. "They are under the same great obligation;—in their manner of practically acknowledging it, they are my pattern;—they keep me to their level. If their shares of the grand concern were more worthily attended to, probably mine would also. One has fancied sometimes what might have been the effect, in the selected instances, if the case had been that the Sovereign Creator had appointed but a few men, here and there one, to an immortal existence, or at least *declared* it only with respect to them. One

cannot help imagining them to feel, every hour, the impression of their sublime and awful predicament! But why—why is it less felt a sublime and solemn one, because the rest of our race are in it too? Does not each as a perfectly distinct *one*, stand in the whole magnitude of the concern, and the responsibility, and the danger, as absolutely if there were no other one? How is it less to him than if he thus stood alone? *Their* losing the happy interest of eternity will not be, that he shall not have lost it for himself. If he shall have lost it, he will feel that they have not lost it for him. He should therefore now feel that upon him is concentrated, even individually upon him, the entire importance of this chief concern.

There is far too little of the serious practice of bringing as near together in view as thought *can* do it, the two orders of things which both belong to us—so belong to us that they must both be taken into our practical adjustment. Our thinking and talking abound with comparisons and comparative estimates. We are often placing one kind of property,—one condition in life,—one career of action,—one measure of talent,—one model of character,—respectively, in comparison against another. We put one tract and climate of the earth, our own frequently, in comparison against a remote and very different one; and with what interest this is done when a migration is contemplated as probable! Now there are two classes of things, the subjects of an unspeakably more striking comparison; and with this circumstance, that they and the comparison, immediately, and essentially, and profoundly concern us. There is a condition good or evil of this living but dying form of matter, our body;—and the condition of the spirit which inhabits, but is to leave it. There is the world we are in, the object of our senses;—and a world to which we are to go, the object of our faith. There is this short life;—and an endless one. There are the pains and delights of mortality;—and the joys or woes of eternity. Now unless a man really will set himself, in serious thought,

to the comparative estimate of these, and that too as an estimate to be made on his own account, how powerless on *him* must be the call that tells him he must be "IN EARNEST!"

In this particular, of inattention to comparison and proportion, an admonition in terms of reproach might be directed to some persons of large thought and science. They are gratified in contemplating things in their proportions to one another—in calculations of quantities, magnitudes, distances. They will go in this process into the very profound of number;—go to the verge of the solar system, and thence to the fixed stars. They will indulge in all the pleasure and pride of such an intellectual operation, and yet never think of any such thing as an estimate between the things respectively, of a momentary and an eternal existence;—while *this* the most vitally concerns them, which all the other ascertainments of proportion do not!

Another thing may be added to this account of causes tending to frustrate the injunction to be in earnest about our highest concerns; that the mind willingly takes a perverse advantage of the obscurity of the objects of our faith, and for the incompetence of our faculties for apprehending them. What is it that we shall pass through death to see? What can be the manner of a separate spirit's active existence? What is the economy of the other world? How can our mode of existence be formed and adapted to a widely different state! Only glimmering intimations are given through the darkness; if general ideas are given, they are very indefinite ones, if special, they are only similitudes and metaphorical shadows. How thick a veil! And what then? A devout spirit would not indeed ask for that veil to be prematurely undrawn,—would not, with an urgency approaching to profaneness, seek to pierce or rend it. But such a spirit would look intently,—feels a pious inquisitiveness,—make efforts to realize,—"enter into that within the veil,"—and would constantly endeavor to *magnify*, as earnestly wishing to *feel*, the power of the unseen world. But,

as the contrary of all this, how much is there of the disposition to take—from the obscurity, the indefiniteness, the impossibility, of distinctly realizing,—a plea for not thinking on the subject, and for not being deeply interested by it! There is a willingness even to make the veil still more thick, and reduce the glimmering to utter darkness, as strengthening the excuse. "We do not know how to carry our thoughts from this scene into that. It is like entering a mysterious and visionary wilderness. It is evidently implied to us, by the fact as it stands, that the opening of that scene upon us now would confound us in all our business here. Were it not best to be content to mind chiefly our duty here; and when it shall be God's will and time, he will show us what there is yonder!" Partial truth thus perversely applied, tends to cherish and excuse an indisposition to look forward in contemplations of hereafter; and this indisposition, excused or protected by this allegation, defeats the force of the call, the summons, to be in earnest about our highest interests.

There is another pernicious practical deception, through which the force of this call to earnestness is defeated, and the strong necessity which it urges, is evaded; that is, the not recognizing in *the parts* of life, the grand duty and interest which yet is acknowledged to belong to it as *a whole*. "It belongs to this life," a man shall say, "to make an earnest and effectual business of the supreme concern." How belongs to it? to what part? to the last year or hours of it? or to a time of sickness? or to any season or stage of it in particular? "No; the concern is combined with it as a whole; it all belongs to it all." Well, but then this grand interest is to be felt clinging as it were to each part, and all the parts. Do you let it be so? Do you feel it so? No; you spend one part, and use another part, as an exempt thing; you do not acknowledge the great interest as enforced upon *that*. Still "life," you say, "as *a whole*, is for the grand concern." But what is the *whole*, if part, and part, passes free of the practical claim? If every spot you are

successively upon is as a little unclaimed island, where at last is the continent for the kingdom of God to be established over? And yet, through a fatal fallacy, life is still regarded as *the something altogether*, in which is to be accomplished the purpose in question! "*This* day is not much," a man thinks, "nor this week,—a particle only in so ample a thing as all life;" and he is not distinctly sensible that he is doing all he can, in each separate part, to throw the whole of the grand affair on a narrowing breadth,—on the *last* part,—or quite *off the whole*. He may not perceive, that while this delusion, like a mighty evil spirit, is still clearing and driving off, space after space, the momentous concern,—it is thickening and darkening, if we may so speak, and becoming charged with awful thunders, to fall upon him in his last hour or in eternity!

We add one more description of delusive feeling tending to frustrate the admonitions to an earnest intentness on the great object,—a soothing self-assurance, founded, the man can hardly explain on what, that some way or other, a thing which is so essentially important, will be effected, surely *must* be effected, because it is so indispensable. Very few, we may presume, except those who are dying in despair, really give up themselves for lost. A man says, "I *am* not mad. I surely shall not lose my soul." As if there must be something in the very order of nature, to prevent any thing going *so far* wrong as *that*. So that the full sense of danger presses home on very few;—on very few even of those who are forced to suspect themselves to be, if taken as just now, in a situation obnoxious to danger. They trust that the deciding moment is not to find them thus, *however* it is to be that this confidence is to be verified. It is indeed partly in themselves, that they trust for this. They have reason and conscience, and a settled conviction of the most important truth in the world. "These cannot fail to answer, *at length*, their proper end. Adequate causes must and will have their effects." But these *have* failed hitherto, and are even *now* in-

efficacious. How is that? They cannot tell how or why, but they *will* not always fail. There will be more thought, perhaps—more resolution—and less to cause these powers and forces to fail.

Sometimes particular circumstances in a man's history are suffered to excite in him a kind of *superstitious* hope. Perhaps, for instance, in his childhood or since, he was saved from peril or death in some very remarkable manner. His friends thought that this must surely be a propitious omen; and he too is willing to persuade himself so. Perhaps very pious persons have taken a particular interest about him; he knows he has been the subject of many prayers. I recollect the instance of a man, and not at all a weak man in point of general sense, who was surrendered to the vanities of life; but retaining constantly and fully the right conviction as to the absolute necessity of religion, and the final consequence of the neglect of it. A kind friend said to him, "How long is this to continue? you know perfectly to what end this is going." He answered, that he had great hope that a better state of things would come sometime: for he had great confidence that *the prayers of his pious departed mother* could not have been in vain!

A man may encourage this soothing confidence that he shall not fatally neglect,—that he shall yet become in earnest—from recollection of moments and occasions when he thinks he was so. There may have been times of affecting, though transient interest. He is willing to persuade himself they were genuine emotions, excited by a principle imparted from above; which principle he believes, if really imparted, will not be wholly and finally withdrawn, though its operation may be long intermitted. On this he rests some kind of confidence; instead of soberly judging, that emotions so transient, and subsequently useless, could be no more than superficial effects on his passions.

So many deceptive notions may contribute to a vague sort of assurance that a man will not always

neglect religion, though he is doing so now, and is in no serious disposition to do otherwise. In addition to all, there is that unthinking and unscriptural manner of considering and carelessly throwing ourselves upon *the infinite goodness of God.*

Thus we have attempted to discriminate and describe some of the causes that it is so difficult to impart any interest, or even draw any steady attention, to a topic so plain, and trite, and general, as the necessity of being quite in earnest, though about concerns confessedly the most momentous.

---

## IX.

### EARNESTNESS IN RELIGION ENFORCED.

*I would thou wert cold or hot.*—This short passage was taken for the use of enforcing an exhortation even still more general and common, though still less particular and specific than that which would fairly arise from the import and connection of the words. Its most proper application had been to insist on the criminality, the peculiarly absurd inconsistency, and the consequences of indifference in the professed servants of Christ; its dishonour to their profession; its offensiveness to their Lord; its danger to themselves; —a reference to their profession being constantly made.

But we were content to go on the wide general ground, where all men may be met with, the plain, serious admonition of the absolute necessity of being in earnest about their highest concerns. Our time was chiefly employed in attempting to distinguish and exemplify a number of things which contribute to render inefficacious this constantly repeated general inculca-

tion of so plain a matter;—and not only inefficacious, but even dull and uninteresting, insomuch that mere attention is with difficulty gained for it, except by aid of some special and subsidiary topic.

But still it would be very strange, if this plain consideration, or fact, of the absolute necessity of EARNESTNESS IN RELIGION, even in the most general and accustomed form in which it can present itself, should be reduced to take its rank with the things which have been repeated till we mind them no longer! It would be very strange if the renewed mention of such a matter should be exactly that which may be made with the fullest assurance of not disturbing the soul into thought or emotion; so that you may mention one thing and another, and you will rouse the spirit;—mention *this*, and it will sleep! Very strange, again, if the compelled attention to the fact that I am indifferent and careless, should be quite unavailing to disturb and alarm that indifference! A strong application of the terms that charge and reprove indifference will sometimes force a man to verify his own consciousness that he is indifferent,—that it is not a vague reproach which may perhaps strike there or yonder; but that here—at home—in his own soul, is the very thing which the oracles of Heaven pronounce to be so fatal. Yet even this shall not break, but for a moment, the dull tranquillity! So that neither the things themselves that should excite to earnestness can avail,—nor the solemn charge and consciousness that they do not. But what a depth of depravity, that can thus receive and swallow up such masses of alarming truth and fact, and then be as if all this were nothing! How sad, that for men to be awfully wrong, and to be admonished, and to be aware that they are so, should leave them still at ease!

It is not that men are constituted creatures without feeling. No: they are warm through their whole being with affections and passions; and an infinite multiplicity of objects acting on them. Think of the movements of the heart, in the inhabitants of a great

city, during a single day,—loving, desiring, hoping, hating, fearing, regretting! What an infinity of emotions! What a stupenduous measure of active vitality! Now consider,—to these souls are presented, among the other objects of interest, the things most important, desirable, and terrible in the universe; these things are placed before them, and pressed on them, as evidently and as closely and palpably, as reason and revelation can. We know what should be the effect of these. We can think what it should be on any individual whom the eye happens to fix upon, known or a stranger. We can look on the passing train, or the collected crowd, and think what it should be on each, and all. What a measure therefore this would be of a good spirit in such an assemblage! What *is* the effect on the far greater number? There are abundant indications to inform you *what* it is, or rather what it is not. And if the case be so, in an enlightened and Christian community, *what is* MAN! "*What is* MAN!" might be the compassionate sentiment of an angelic beholder, or of a saint in heaven, supposing him in view of this object on earth;—observing a rational and immortal being, involved in a relation the most perfect, vital, and inseparable with all that is most important;—the reality of that relation manifested to him, enforced upon him;—and yet, he generally as insensible to it almost as a statue of stone is to the objects surrounding it! But might not the compassion become mingled with indignation, when it should be observed how unlike an insensible figure he is toward other objects with which his relation is separable and transient? Nevertheless the great interest is still the same;—bears all the importance of eternity upon it;—remains as that sky above us, with its luminaries and its solemn and infinite depth, whether we look at it or not. The effects must be continually renewed for breaking up this wretched and pernicious indifference, both in others and in ourselves. And the considerations applicable to this purpose are innumerable, and have been all repeated, times without number.

A more proper admonition cannot be suggested in the first place, than,—to beware that the indifference of the feelings does not infect and pervert the judgment. In conjunction with such a state of the heart, it is in great danger of losing its firmness and correctness. How much more ready the judgment is to take its character from the feelings, than they theirs from it! Without any reproach to any thing like a formal denial of the supreme importance of the spiritual and future interests, there may be an influence insidiously stealing through the estimates of the judgment, so that they shall be modified insensibly—less decisively marked, less positively pronounced. This may be by a gradual effect, without special thoughts and reasonings. Or with the occasional intervention of thoughts such as this;—"Surely man is not placed in a scene that he beholds, for the purpose chiefly of looking toward one that he cannot see. Can it be that I am sent into this busy and interesting world, that my main business may be to think about going out of it. What! am I here to make nothing of all this? Under a reversed economy, have I most to do with what is furthest off?—There is so much that I must attend to here;—must in duty occupy my thoughts, cares, and time with, that it were hard there should be another great exaction and burden continually upon me. I acknowledge the great importance of that other concern; but may I not hope that the merciful Creator will take care of that for me?" So the judgment may be partly perverted to excuse the indifference. Let us beware of this seduction. As far as the judgment falls into conformity with wrong feelings, it is in vain to appeal to conscience; it retires under the protection of the judgment. Thus the soul is left deserted to the power of its perverse and irreligous dispositions.

But let there be a settled conviction on the mind, not equivocated with, though unhappily too dormant and inoperative, that the spiritual and immortal interests really do demand earnest attention, and then a train of remonstrances against indifference and care-

lessness may be urged on that mind. It may be urged on such a man,—Will you not, can you not resolve to converse with your own spirit sometimes? You can speak freely, and hear patiently, *there*. If it be a mortifying converse, there is none to overhear it, but ONE! and your self-love will be sure to survive unhurt. You can say to yourself, "It is really thus and thus that I firmly believe,—and shall believe, in life, death, and to all eternity. But then here in my soul is the most astonishing inconsistency and contradiction—not a more dreadful one in the creation;—dreadful, for it is a practical one, in the very highest concern of a created being. The consequences of its continuance are plain before me, inevitable and terrible. And am I quietly to go on thus, thinking as little as I can about it? Do I coolly consent that it shall be so, for the present at least, and for I know not how long?"

Let him consider, and say—"There they stand before me, not in a deceptive vision, but in an absolute reality, the most important things that can be in the view of any being on this globe, or that has left it—*the Redeemer of man—salvation—perdition—death—judgment—eternity!* They stand confronting me, that there may be in me something corresponding to them. It is in the presence of GOD that I thus stand with these most awful objects before me; it is by his light that I see them; it is his authority, in its utmost fulness, that insists on their demand of a corresponding state of my mind; it is his voice that pronounces me lost, if that answerable state be not here. And yet, is it the fact, that I am indifferent still? Here is the soul that can acknowledge all this, and still not tremble, nor care, nor strive, nor pray! can be at liberty for any pursuit, or gayety, or amusement!"—One could almost imagine, that realizing such a state of things in a man's own soul, might produce an amazement enough to suspend for a while even the sense of personal interest; that a man might be absorbed awhile before he came again to the consciousness of being himself the subject; as we should look at some

strange and dreadful phenomenon in the natural world. In truth, there is no phenomenon in that world so portentous!

In such a condition, sensibly so, in a measure, men can give their attention and activity to all manner of interests and pursuits,—many very trifling ones. But the remonstrance should follow them still. Recollect *what* it is that you are warmly pursuing *this*, to the neglect of, and in preference to! Cannot you rise to the resolution of saying deliberately, "Why should this take the precedence, *why?* Is there one moment in which I seriously approve its doing so? Will there ever be such a moment? and if there should!—Is not this my preference made on the very principle that creates all the evil and misery in the universe! Is it not a perversity of will inclined to the worse? Do I not know that I am giving this the preference by the neglect of an interest infinite millions of times more important? Am I then an immortal, under some dreadful charm and curse, that dooms me to live but for the hour, or the day, or the few uncertain days of this my abode, in the dust,—unable to go forth in a capacious apprehension of the great hereafter? Or when shall the case cease to be thus?" If his mind answer evasively, "Not always will it be thus, I hope—not long—perhaps not to-morrow." Have you then, it might be said to him, such easy faith? Do you adhere *for the present*, to your preference, on a calculation of *disgusting* yourself at length with what you prefer? that at the next turn, the right preference may be the easier? But why has the preceding train of your wrong preferences done so little to disgust, or satiate, or change you?

Or if we shall suppose that there *is* often a certain degree of disgust and recoil;—that a sense of the vanity and insufficiency of things is forced on the soul;—that the heart cannot find the living element it longs for, in any of these terrestrial things; so that the active spirit, for a while, remits, in disappointment, and is reduced to stand detached and retired. This should

be well; but what is the consequence? Alas! too often, it but reverts awhile in a gloomy mood to recover and look out to see where it may try again! There is no look toward heaven, except perhaps, for a moment, in something like an emotion of revenge upon the earth; let another delusive gleam of the world's sunshine come, and that emotion passes away!

But these seasons of dissatisfaction and recoil, this sickness of the heart, experienced in the exclusive pursuit of inferior interests, might be seized upon by the Christian admonisher. He would say,—"Acknowledge that at these seasons you are in truth struck and troubled by a power from the other world, whether distinctly recognized or not;—an obscure and suppressed sympathy with the true cause of happiness. There is a certain sense of an infinitely greater interest neglected. Consider those who are earnestly intent on the higher object, are *they* subject to these seasons of mortifying recoil from them? Have they a forced perception of their vanity? Are they almost ashamed of them? Does there not come upon you sometimes an irresistible conviction that if you had long since become animated with the spirit of the religion of Christ, it would have been infinitely the best and happiest thing that could have befallen you? Has not this conviction prompted you to exclaim, 'What a course of happy feeling and estimable life it would have been, as compared with my past existence! One little stage of it would have been of more worth than all these long vain years have been. I should have walked with God thus far, and with his saints and angels.'" There are at least some who are visited by such reflections. But, we say,—What, then, NOW? Will you make this *past*, which you are compelled to condemn and deplore, the very precedent and pattern for what is to come? Would it not be the very worst effect of all, from this misapplied past, if it make you careless of the present and future? if it chain you to a fatal consistency? It is enough for you that *that* past has lost *itself!* When *this present* too shall have become

*past*, and lost, will it appear a good reason, that the preceding periods of life were so? This time that is here, and that is coming on, lies between on the one hand, a trifled-away portion of your existence,——and the most grand and awful portion of it on the other! Now think and choose in the presence of God, shall it be conformed to the character of the former or of the latter? Consider, *wherein* would it have been so good, so happy a thing, that through preceding life you had been in earnest about the one thing needful? *wherein*, but chiefly in the manner in which it would have been carrying you forward towards the Great Futurity! But you are *going* toward that same Futurity! it is the one constant inevitable action of life;—your progress is not turning another way than in the former stages; it has no reversed or circuitous movement;—it is direct, and think how rapid! Every step seems to belong more to that awful futurity and its realities, than the preceding; by the same rule that the last step, which is to be into eternity, appears to have a transcendent importance,—so in proportion all that are approximating to it. Now if you allow that in regard to that Futurity, it would have been so happy, that the progress *hitherto* had been in the earnest spirit of a Christian, what do you think of the remaining progress from *this* point, with the realities in prospect rising higher and larger, and more majestic above the horizon of your view? Consider too, that whatever the world and time could have given you from the first, they can at all events give you much less now, and what is sooner to be taken away.

*When*, and *by what*, shall this sad indifference be broken up and leave you? Would you quietly wait for some alarming dispensation of Providence to do it? to be admonished as Pharaoh was in vain? Would you wait till some heavy affliction? till some disaster in your worldly affairs? till another dear relative or friend shall die? till a severe sickness, with imminent threatenings of death? Can you be content to wait for such visitations? and with the perfect cer-

tainty that, if they should come, and should effectually alarm you out of this indifference, that alarm will be mingled with an aggravated remorse, and indeed will very much consist of it? remorse especially to think that "the goodness of God" has not "led to repentance?"

But have no such visitations come to you already? What was their effect? Are you to be so much more sensible to the impressions of the next? or do you wish them to be ten-fold more severe? If you *can* wish so, the interest for which you wish so, must be most urgent! But if it *be* so urgent, why neglected *now*? Consider besides, that the next severe visitation may be the last of life;—may be a fatal disaster;—may be a mortal illness! Or would you wait for old age? What! because it is confessedly a great *moral miracle* for a man careless *till* old age, to be awakened *then!* Or will a man profane a Christian doctrine, and say, the Spirit of God alone can be efficacious, and he must quietly wait for that? This is saying in effect, that he will make a trial with Omnipotence, and resist as long as he can! How can he anticipate any other than a *destructive* energy from that Spirit upon him, while he is trifling with, and frustrating truth—conviction—warnings—and emotions of conscience! while he is repelling all these minor operations of that Spirit, instead of earnestly praying for the greater! It were most wicked thus to pretend a reverence for the ultimate powers of the Divine Spirit, and at the same time make light of what comes from that Spirit already.

How dreadfully obstinate a state is this careless indifference! But nevertheless we can imagine situations under the force of which it *must* give way! Imagine them! but that is not all:—we are certain to be in one or other of them, *sometime!* Happy will it be, if the love of Christ shall effectually constrain us;—if there be a prevailing impression that our affections and powers are due to him; that we must do something for him, and his great cause, while we are on earth. Happy! if an ardent desire of heaven;—

happy! even if the thought of the "terrors of the Lord," should contribute to persuade us! But though all these should fail, and leave us indifferent still, there will be in reserve, that which cannot fail,—situations and circumstances of irresistible power! *Can* a man calmly refer himself to these! *Can* a man say, "I know I *must* awake from this indifference at last—I will indulge it *till then!*"——"Here is a dull, stupid state of soul, but there will be blows upon it so mighty as to make it quiver with the intensest feeling!"——"I am making light of *anticipations*;—well, the *realities* will come!"——"Here I am, easily soothing my conscience;—it is but that it may rise upon me with tremendous strength!"——"Now I am lightly dismissing, or evading a solemn and alarming reflection;—it goes away but to come back as if transformed into an avenging spirit!"——"I am dissipating my mind among trifles,—be it so,—a tempest *will* arise which will blast them all away!"——"I am *now* but in order to what I *shall be then;* what I shall be *then* will remind me of what I am *now!*"—Such a man can now put in words some of the sentiments, the reflections, the emotions which his earnestness may breathe itself in, in the hour of death. Let him do it; and then say whether there be any thing possible or conceiveable in this world that he should be so anxious for, as that he may not *so* be in earnest at that hour. This is the appeal to *Fear*, a just and salutary appeal; but think how strange it is, that it should be necessary to lay the emphasis *here;* when that which the soul is called and excited to be in earnest for, is *an infinite good!*—deliverence from all evil—salvation—eternal blessedness! Here are objects of mightiest attraction for the better passions, and yet it is necessary to work by fear! as if mere escape, and impunity, and safety, were all! as if it were no good for ourselves, and only to please or pacify a power to which we are in subjection! What a manifestation of the fallen state of our nature!

Let us beware of the delusive feeling as if indifference, however prolonged, had still nothing in it of the

nature of a decision; as if it were but remaining in a kind of suspension and protracted equipoise. Are we insensible that an additional weight is falling all the while on the other side, by mere time itself which is going, particle by particle, to the wrong;— by irreligious habit, which is growing stronger and stronger; —and by negation, refusal, all the while, of what is claimed by the higher interest! We decide against that which we refuse to adopt. So that prolonged indifference *is* decision so far; and *indifference* to the *end* will *but be decision completed!*

---

## X.

### COMPREHENSIVENESS OF THE DIVINE LAW.

"*Thy commandment is exceeding broad.*"—The first view of the relation between God and all other beings, is that of His being their Creator. The next view of the relation is that which manifests him as a Lawgiver. By the very nature of the case, this must be an essential part of the relation. No right so absolute, to give laws, can be conceived, as that of the Creator. For he is nesessarily the Supreme being. He has a perfect and exclusive property in what he has created. All created being is entirely dependent on him, for being and well-being. He alone can have a perfect understanding of what is the right state, and the right procedure of created beings; they cannot understand themselves, and therefore could not, if they would, devise competent laws. He alone has the power to enforce a system of laws over the whole creation. The mention of the "whole creation" may suggest one application of the terms,—the amazing extent of the scene of his legislation! In all probability there are

worlds, with intelligent inhabitants, extending beyond all conceivable number, and dimension of space; and One Dictator of laws,—of commands,—to them all! But, think of one world, only,—our own, in this sense of "exceeding broad."

But doubtless, not the wide compass of the scene and subjects, is meant, but the quality of the law, as imperative on man; its authority and requirement applied to so many points; the comprehensiveness, the universality of its jurisdiction. It reaches and comprehends the whole extent of all things, in which there is the distinction of right and wrong—good and evil. Now then think of the almost infinite multiplicity of things in which this distinction has a place; the grand total of what is passing,—in men's minds, converse, and action—is passing at this hour—has been in the course of the day—during the whole course of life of each and all. Think how much—how little—of all this can justly be considered as withdrawn from the jurisdiction of the divine authority and law. A wide rain, or the beams of the sun, hardly fall on a greater multitude and diversity of things.

Now, an intelligent creature in a right state,—that is, a holy state, in harmony with God, would be deeply pleased, that all things should be thus marked with a signification of his will. For how happy to be in all things at the direction of the Supreme Wisdom!—in all things made clearly aware what is conformity to the Divine Excellence; insomuch that,—if the case could be supposed, of any thing of material interest being left without this mark of the divine will, under an eclipse of the light from God, that would, to such a spirit, appear as something distressing, and fearful and portentous,—would be felt as threatening some indefinable hazard. To a being possessed and filled with the reverential love of God, it would be a most acceptable and welcome thing that thus it should be made manifest in all things what is his pleasure;—that the whole field of existence and action should bear, all over it, the decided and precise delineations, as on

a map, of the ways which his creatures are to take. Should it not be so?—Must it not be so to an uncorrupted and holy creature of God? But is it so to the general spirit of mankind? is it so naturally to any of them? No,—it is not a welcome thing that the "commandment," the law of God is so "exceeding broad." Accordingly, its breadth is, in every imaginable way, endeavoured to be narrowed. It is true, that even the very apprehension of it is very limited and faint. If the dulness and contractedness of apprehension could be set aside for an interval, and a palpable, luminous manifestation made of the vast compass, and the whole order of distinctions of this divine law, it would strike as ten times,—a hundred times, beyond all that had been suspected. Yet still, in multitudes of minds, there is apprehension enough of such a widely-extended law, to cause disquietude, to excite reaction, and a recourse to any thing that will seem to narrow that law.

We might notice several expedients and aiding causes, for this effect of contracting and reducing the extent and magnitude of the divine law. The bold, direct, decisive one, is—infidelity; to deny the existence of the Supreme Lawgiver himself. Then the Sovereign Voice is silent. Then the destruction of the divine law takes place, as it were, from the centre instead of by a contraction of its wide extension. Then all things are right which men wish, and can, and dare do; right, as to any concern of conscience,—the practical regulations which atheists would feel the necessity for, would be only a matter of policy and mutual self-defence.

To reject a revelation is an expedient little less summary and effectual for the purpose. A God believed, or supposed,—but making no declaration of his will, and the retribution, would give very little disturbance to sinners. For as to what has been termed natural religion,—though a fine systematic theory may be framed, it is, for any thing like practical effect, no more than a dream. It was so among the bulk of the culti-

vated heathens; and now the rejecters of revelation would be sure not to allow themselves to be defrauded of their advantage, by admitting any thing more than they liked of the rules or authority of natural religion.

But not to dwell on the express and formal rejection of the divine law, but suppose it admitted in the ordinary way as among the generality in a Christian nation, there are many things to frustrate its quality of "exceeding broad."

We hardly need say how effectually this is done by the indulgence of sin, in action, or though but in the heart. It is by the understanding and the conscience that the divine law is to be apprehended in its amplitude. Now nothing is more notorious than the baneful effect which indulged and practised sin has on both these. It inflicts a grossness on the understanding, which renders it totally unadapted to take cognizance of any thing that is to be "spiritually discerned;" as unadapted as our bodily senses are to perceive spirits. It throws a thick obscurity over the whole vision of the divine law, so that nothing of it is distinctly perceived, except when sometimes some part of it breaks out in thunder. The conscience partakes the stupefaction; is insensible to a thousand accusations and menaces of the divine law, every one of which ought to have been pungent and painful.

The general operation of self-love in a corrupted being, is adverse to any clear and effectual acknowledgment of "the exceeding breadth" of the divine law. The being has a certain sense of not being in a state of peace and harmony with God, but of alienation, opposition, and in a degree, hostility; but still devotedly loves itself. It has therefore a set of self-defensive feelings against him. But since it could not defend itself against his power, it endeavors to defend itself against his law. It ventures to question the necessity or propriety of one point of his law;—refuses to admit the plain interpretation of another—or to admit the clear inferences from undeniable rules. It makes large portions of the divine laws refer to other men and times; to special and tran-

sient occasions and circumstances; is ingenious in inventing exemptions for itself; weakens the force of both the meaning and the authority of the divine dictates, which it cannot avert from their application to itself. Thus it "renders void" much of both the spirit and the letter; and thus places itself amidst a dwindled and falsified system of the divine legislation.

Add to this the influence of the customs and maxims of the world. For a moment, suppose these admitted to constitute the supreme law and standard. Let all that these adjudge superfluous, be left out and rejected; all that these account indifferent, be set down so;—all that these warrant by practice, be formally sanctioned; all that these pronounce honourable and admirable, be inscribed in golden letters; all that these have settled as true wisdom, be adopted as principles and oracles. Especially, let what the customs and notions of the world have mainly satisfied themselves with in respect to religion be admitted, as the true scheme of our relations and duties to God. This system now!—Let it be placed opposite to the divine law! Would it not be like Baal's prophets confronting Elijah? like Satan propounding doctrine to our Lord? like a holy angel and a devil looking in each other's face? But, think!—this is actually the system on which the notions and habits of the multitude are formed! Thus the divine law, in its exceeding breadth, is made, as it is said of the heavens, to "depart as a scroll that is rolled together."

But short of so decidedly antichristian a standard, there is among us a great deal of an accommodating way of thinking of the divine law; an unsound and treacherous casuistry; a sort of middle principles, by which those of divine authority are altered, and qualified, and shaped, to suit better to the habits of the world, and the temper of the times;—a defective faith in our Lord's declaration—"no man can serve two masters."

Another thing by which the "exceeding breadth" of the divine law is narrowed, as to its acknowledgment and application, is a notion and a feeling as if—

man being so very imperfect a creature, it cannot be that there is an absolutely perfect law in authority over him. It is impossible for him to meet such a law in full conformity, and therefore it is a moderate and more indulgent one that he is responsible to. But where is there any declaration of such a law? What can the idea really mean, but a tolerance and approval of something that is evil? Something different from that which is perfect—less than—what can this be but evil? Shall there be a law from the holy God to sanction evil, because man is evil?

Worse, if possible, than all these modes of making void the law, is that which attempts to do it on the plea of grace; which pretends to absolve Christians from the claims of the sovereign rule, because their justification is on an entirely different ground. So that they stand as independent of the law, as he is who appointed it. There are different degrees in which this odious heresy is made a practical principle. A spirit truly renewed through divine grace, becomes an emphatic approver of the law. It is a reflection of the character of him whom he adores, and wishes to resemble.

Such are the expedients, and modes, and operations of depravity to frustrate "the commandment." But let us solemnly consider, that all the while, and after all, that divine law remains in its exceeding breadth. Then what should a man gain, though he could keep it out of sight—delude and please himself with a diminished conception of it,—through his whole life on earth? Since he must go out of the world to meet him that has appointed it, and never abrogated or changed it, "not one jot or tittle." There too he will meet IT, this law itself, resplendent in eternity.

"Exceeding broad." It is so, by the comprehensive applicableness of its grand simple rules. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and soul, and strength, and thy neighbour as thyself." It is so by the ample order of its special injunctions. Where is there a spot without a signal of the divine

will? It is so, by laying an authoritative hand on the first principles and origin from which any thing can proceed, in human spirit and action; then it reaches to all things that do or can proceed thence. It asserts a jurisdiction over all thought and inward affection. All language is uttered under this same jurisdiction. All that the world and each man are in action about. Even over what is not done, it maintains its authority, and pronounces its dictates and judgments. It is a positive thing with respect to what is negative, omission, non-existence. Like the divine government in the material world, over the wastes, deserts, and barren sands. From these spaces of nothing, it can raise up substantial forms of evil, of sin, in evidence against men. As at the resurrection men will rise from empty wastes, where it would not have been suspected that any were concealed. Let a man look back on all his omissions, and think what the divine law can raise from them against him. Thus the law, in its exceeding breadth, is vacant nowhere; it is not stretched to this wide extent by chasms and void spaces. If a man could find one such, he might there take his position for sin with impunity, if not with innocence.

But to realize all this to the heart and conscience, what seriousness of thought is necessary! What of all this will be visible to a careless, thoughtless spirit? How necessary spiritual discernment imparted, maintained, and increased, by divine instruction and influence! This brings, as it were, a new element into the creation around us. When this is given to one that had been a stupid, insensible sinner, what a manifestation, what a vision there becomes apparent to him of the divine law!

An inference from such representations plainly is, that great self-complacency is a treacherous, deluded, and dangerous state.

If such be the law, how impossible is human salvation by it! Let man be brought before it in judgment, under the condition, "cursed is every one that continu-

eth not in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them." He must not shrink from this view, who is really in earnest to be saved. One more just and natural consequence will be,—a perfect horror of taking any ground at all like this for acceptance before God. We need not fear to assert, that, with such a view of the law, and man being such as he is, it would have been very difficult to believe even a revelation of divine mercy, which should profess to take effect on the ground of the law or not on any other ground. A strong doubt and question would have arisen: "How can the holy God so set aside his law? Why did he appoint it? Is it not absolutely just and good? Will it comport with holiness to suffer a vast and general violation of it, defiance of it, by our race, and no dreadful and penal consequences follow—provided men should be willing to be pardoned by him,—and be somewhat sorry for their having set his law at nought?"

Therefore, the *rational* theory would be,—that if God would extend mercy and salvation to so guilty a race, it would much more probably be on the ground of some quite different economy. And therefore,—a revelation of something purporting to be such a quite different economy, would beforehand have every probability in its favour, as compared with any plan which should retain the law as the foundation. The plan by the law was evidently an utterly ruined plan; it could not save one; it could only condemn to perish. If men were to be saved, and still upon the original economy, it was to be independently of the law, and in opposition to it. But, independently, and in opposition!!—Who would make them independent? Who would bear them harmless in that opposition? If the divine goodness in the form of *mercy* would do it,—what became of the divine goodness in the form of *righteousness*? Should the rebellious creatures utterly violate and demolish the economy of justice, and come triumphant out of its ruin as having forced the supreme Governor to the bare expedient of mercy?

All this gives beforehand a high and rational probability to the new economy, constituted in the Mediator; acceptance, justification, salvation—solely and entirely through the work and sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The believing, grateful accepters of this economy will see the more of its inestimable value, the more they apprehend of the "exceeding breadth" of the divine law. The rejecters of it may be exhorted to turn their solemn attention on that law—to study it long—and see whether they dare finally venture to stand on that ground.

---

## XI.

### SELF-DISCIPLINE SUITABLE TO CERTAIN MENTAL STATES.

"*Be wise, and guide thine heart in the way.*"—In our course through life, our minds are liable to be, they actually are in succession and change, placed in certain states of feeling, strongly marked, and for the time, strongly prevailing; by causes by influences and circumstances, independent of our will. We might call them *moods;* by many serious persons they are denominated *frames.* They are produced by facts and events that we witness or hear of; by views of the state of the world;—by particular subjects of thought, forcibly impressed on our minds;—by circumstances in our own immediate condition;—by the state of our health;—by even the seasons of the year. And they form a state of feeling, distinguished by a stronger character, from the quiet, ordinary tone. Now the lesson we would wish to inculcate is this: that these states of feeling, thus involuntarily produced, should be carefully turned to a profitable account; that we should

avail ourselves of what there is in them specially adapted to afford improvement.

It is hardly necessary to make the previous observation, that there are many strong feelings to which we are liable which we are not to talk of turning to account, they being absolutely evil, such as should be resisted, repressed, and crushed altogether. For instance, envy,—malice,—revenge,—a rebellious feeling against God; such as these can be turned to *no* profitable account; they are not like some *natural* evils, which may, as poisons may, be made medicinal; not so these moral and spiritual poisons; at least by *man* they cannot be turned to beneficial use; doubtless they can by God, else, infinite power and goodness would not have permitted their existence in his creation.

But the states of feeling to which we refer are such as are *not* essentially and necessarily evil. They may be called a kind of natural seasons in the soul; somewhat parallel to the seasons and the climates of the natural world; only not having their regularity and fixed order. They have their evils, and may be suffered to become great evils; but still are available to good, by a wise and religious care. In other terms, they may be described as elements, having in them what may be applied to the very best and most advantageous uses. These varied states of feeling are of the two great classes, the *pleasing*, and the *unpleasing*; the latter being felt oftener and more sensibly.

But we will begin with an illustration of the more pleasing order. You can easily represent to yourselves the example of a person quite in the sunshine of feeling; a person perhaps constitutionally cheerful, —in excellent health,—in the prime of life,—and a great number of circumstances around him very much according to his wishes. And in addition to all this, there may be, at some particular season, some more than ordinary cause to animate the pleasurable state of his mind;—some bright smiles of what we call "good fortune," beaming out upon him; some important matter that was depending, decided in his favour;

some new delightful confidence or acquisition, in regard to the interests of friendship and affection;—some gratifying circumstances in the affairs of his family. Now you have the image before you of the person in this high exhilaration; his soul overrunning with delight, his countenance lighted up with animation!

But do you gravely consider the case? How will it be with him, what will be the benefit of all this, if he do not exercise reflection? if he do not "guide his heart?" It is far too probable that all this will mightily tend and lead to direct evil;—to forgetfulness of God,—to unbounded love of the world,—to banishment of all thought of death and hereafter; perhaps to levity, frivolity, and a revelling in amusement and luxury.

But at the very best it will be this; he will indulge himself in the fulness of his satisfaction. He will have no use of his delight but to enjoy it,—to devour it. And all he will think will be, "To-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant."

Now, what would you wish to say to him? "Can you be content to have no good but this, of all this animation and glow, and expansion of heart? Just to give yourself up to be delighted,—to bound and dance in thoughtless felicity, like an animal of the spring, or an insect of the sunshine? You are suffering to consume away, in mere useless sparkle and blaze, a precious element of mind, which might, while it burns, be applied to some noble purposes."

Here is the lesson which we are desiring to inculcate; that is, the consideration of the valuable uses to which a bright season of the soul should be employed. It should not be forgotten, that one point of wisdom in such a case, may be, somewhat to repress and sober such an exhilaration of the heart. There might be such an intoxication of joyous sentiment as should be fit for nothing but wild mirth. But in truth, it will seldom be long before there shall be something or other to damp this, even without seeking it. And the

consideration that the fine pleasurable season of the spirits may not last long, but is liable to become chilled and overcast, should be a strong admonition for losing no time in turning it to the best account. And to what account might we suppose a wise man to turn it?

In the first place,—it would surely be a wise application of this pleasurable state of feeling, to seek most seriously, that some of it may be directed into the channel of gratitude to God. Consider! "Why am I not, at this hour, overwhelmed with distress, instead of these feelings of delight? I deserve to be so, and many of my fellow-mortals are so, who probably deserve it less. Is it not because God is exceedingly good to me? To constitute this state which I am now enjoying, how many cares and gifts of that beneficent Father,—how many collective rays of mercy from that open heaven! And does my heart absorb all, and reflect nothing? All this that tells me of the Supreme Benefactor, does it really but make me, or prove me, an Atheist? In what manner—by what means—am I expecting ever to be reminded of God—*ever* to be drawn toward him, if his *goodness* has no such effect? If my heart has absolutely no will to send upward any of its gratifying emotions, as incense to him, what must be its condition? Is not this a reflection calculated instantly to chill all this delight? If, in these pleasurable emotions, there is nothing of a nature that admits of being sent up in grateful devotion, what estimate should I form of my pleasure, my happiness? Content! delighted! with a happiness which by its very nature estranges me from God!"

From which we may observe,—that it will be a wise and valuable use of any season of unusual gladness, to watch narrowly the effect which earthly felicity has upon our minds, in order that the happy, the self-complacent man may see what kind of nature he has to be acted upon;—a sad nature truly, if he sees the fact to be, that the more its wishes are gratified the worse it becomes, if left to itself! Thus should we watch in

order to see the practical proof of the manner in which earthly delight acts on the heart, unless combined with a sanctifying religion.

There may have been a great deal of unthinking declamation about the dangers of prosperity, the perverting guile of earthly pleasure, and topics of this kind. And how often have the gay, the young, the prosperous smiled contemptuously at such discourse! But let us admonish them, that *they* have no business to deride declamation who will not attend to *proof;* and when that proof is in their own souls, at their own most serious cost! A man that shall in a right manner make the kind of observation we are describing, will certainly—not desire to have distress and pain instead of his gladness and gratification—but he will be alarmed into earnestness and prayer that God may never let him fancy himself happy, independently of the divine sources of felicity.

But we might pertinently have applied the admonition to this lively, delighted state of the spirits as owing to certain particular causes or occasions;—as for instance, the recovery of health, from great suffering and peril, or protracted languishing. This is generally a season of extremely pleasurable feeling; but often suffered to be mere pleasure, tending to no use;—the mere joy of having escaped;—the gladness of a prisoner got loose, before he is sober enough to think what he shall do with his liberty. But to what purpose then, has the man been disciplined by suffering, and been rescued by a merciful hand? He should be anxious to "guide his heart" to those purposes which affliction should have taught him. In this animation of feeling he has, in a sense, a *double life*, that which was lost to him during illness being virtually restored to him by this extra animation.

We might have specified that delighted state of feeling—that fine climate or weather of the soul—which some persons experience from the beautiful seasons and scenes of nature. Amid such feelings the thought should never be long absent; "How can

I, as a wise man and a Christian, take the best advantage of this awakening of my sensibility?" No man ever seems to have felt more of this influence than the poetic and inspired Hebrew; and no reader of the Psalms needs to be informed to what use he directed these feelings.

We shall not specify any more of the particular modes and occasions of these bright and warm states of feeling. But considering them generally, we cannot too strongly urge the duty which accompanies them. They should be regarded as cultivators regard the important weeks of the spring;—as mariners regard the blowing of favourable winds;—as merchants seize a transient and valuable opportunity of gain;—as men, overlaboured and almost overmatched in warfare, regard a strong reinforcement of fresh combatants. The spring and energy of spirit felt in these pleasurable seasons of the heart should 'be applied to the use of a more spirited performance of the Christian duties in general, but especially to those which are the most congenial: such as the exercises and services most directly expressive of gratitude to God;—the study and exertions for promoting the happiness of men.

It is more than time to turn to a darker side of our subject. We cannot have been dreaming that these seasons of pleasure are prevailing through the general experience of our race; or with frequency or long duration in the experience of almost any one. The Christian admonisher to "*guide the heart*," will find the occasions but few for exhorting men to turn their joy to a wise account, compared with the cases of a far different kind. It were indeed a gloomy calculation, if it could be made, what proportion of time is passed by mankind collectively in a state of feeling decidedly infelicitous, as compared with their experience of animated pleasure. But a still far worse view of the case is this; how small a portion of their painful feeling turns to any good account.

We do not mean to take a condition of severe and

overwhelming distress, as the subject of the present admonition. Greatly short of this, there are occasional states of darkened, gloomy feeling, continuing for a while, in which sensibility becomes pensiveness, and gravity sadness; in which there is a strong tendency, for the time, to serious ideas and musings of the more melancholy class. It is as if an accustomed barrier had been thrown down on one side of the mind, to admit an invasion of austere thoughts, and unwelcome and threatening images. The immediate cause may have been some untoward turn of events;—some painful disappointment;—or the death of relatives or friends;—and constitutional tendency or defective health may contribute.

Now, this infelicitous season of the soul—shall it not be turned, by wisely "guiding the heart," to lasting advantage? And how may it be so? In many instances all this possible benefit is refused and lost. It is a bad sign when we see a person in this state of feeling just merely anxious and endeavouring to escape from it; when there is a horror of solitude;—a recourse to any thing that will help to banish reflection; such as change of place;—making excursions;—contriving visits and parties; endeavouring to force the spirits up to the pitch of lively society;—even trying amusements, when really little in the mood for amusement. This is a wretched and self-defrauding management.

Certainly, the censure must have some terms of qualification. It is to be acknowledged that in some cases, a gloomy state of the mind is very directly caused by a disordered or debilitated condition of the body. And when we speak too of a constitutional melancholy temperament in some persons, we are but expressing probably some mysterious sympathy of the mind with its corporeal tenement. Now, in cases decidedly of this kind, expedients of allevation will, to a certain extent, be very properly sought in movement—change of scene—or communication with more cheerful spirits.

But for the far greater number of persons experiencing these occasional graver, darker seasons of the mind, there is no such concession to be made. This state of mind should be regarded not as a kind of disorder to be relieved and escaped, but as a visitation to be improved.

One might address such a person thus:—"Now, it is too probable that during your past life, there has been far too little of the voluntary exercise of grave, deep thought, of choosing serious and solemn subjects of reflection, and with an appropriate temper of feeling; that is to say, what a gay spirit would deem a gloomy feeling, and what you may have averted or evaded as such. Now that causes, independent of your will, have placed you, as it were, in the very element for such thought and feeling, let not your chief aim and effort be to escape from it! You had not seriousness enough to *go* into a solemn temple; but now that a hand not to be resisted has *led* you into it, is your sole attention to be fixed on *the door?*—while the oracles of God are inscribed there! the images of the dead are standing there! visions of futurity are disclosed there! Now that light thoughts, and brisk spirits, and worldly pleasures and hopes, are aloof for a while, do take the opportunity for serious consideration. Reflect!—are there no great and solemn questions hitherto, most unwisely, left undecided? When will you be willing to bring them to a decision? Is it to be when you shall have recovered the easy or gay tone of feeling which always averts you from such subjects? Have you yet come to a determinate judgment on the state of your mind, in reference to its greatest interests? If not, is a season of unusually grave feeling, of all times the wrong one for such a purpose? Have you yet come to a full consent of the soul to take death and eternity into the system of your interests; into an intimate combination with all that you are wishing, projecting, and pursuing? If scarcely so,—when is this grand point to be effected? Will these solemn objects come to your view with

more gracious aspect? will they be welcomed nearer to you, when you shall have again become more satisfied or delighted with the gratifications of this life? Shall you call them to meet you in the flowery garden of pleasure?—in your circles of gayety?—among your treasures of acquired gain? Reflect!—have you yet come absolutely to meet God, in your capacity of a sinner condemned,—and to be pardoned and saved? And have you come really and effectually to a believing and grateful reception of the offered redemption by Jesus Christ? If there be any thing dubious as to this great matter, are you impatient to hasten away into a state of feeling in which you may slumber over such a question, and such a doubt?" Or supposing these great interests *not* to be in doubt and hazard,—if there is *any* duty, or any temptation with respect to which the darker season of feeling would aid him to prepare his mind, is it wise to reject that aid?

Now *is* not this a reasonable pleading? It is but requiring that a man should not be willing to come out from a temporary and special state of feeling, without having availed himself of that advantage which it has specially offered him?

But very briefly we will apply the admonition to only one more particular state of feeling which not seldom visits an observer of mankind; namely, *an indignant excitement of mind against human conduct.* It will not be pretended that this is one of those feelings that ought to be extinguished as absolutely evil. It is what the best men have made no scruple of indulging and avowing; the worthiest teachers, protesters, and reformers. But to make the best advantage of it, a man must very wisely "guide his heart." He looks abroad and sees an infinity of things as he knows they ought not to be;—every kind of perversity, depravity, and wrong;—and in many instances iniquity triumphing in power and success. And at times the flame of indignation is made to burn with violence by some particular occurring instance of great iniquity. Now,

he cannot but be sure that, within certain limitations. he "does well to be angry." But then the admonition, "Take care that you manage this fire to answer a good purpose, and that you do not burn yourself. What purpose? It may enforce on you the necessity of a most carefully disciplined judgment. It may surely contribute to aggravate your permanent impression of the extreme evil of sin, let every indignant emotion go thither;—and therefore, to "justify" the Almighty in that part of his economy which is directed in hostility against it; to impress upon you that what is so much to be *hated*, is no less to be *dreaded*. Therefore beware *yourself*. The indignant thoughts and emotions thus going outward, may surely admonish you against leaving all to an indulgent judgment within. Amidst these indignant feelings there should be suggested a warning against a deceptive manner of comparing yourself with others. This state of feeling may admonish you of the sovereignty of God. You look at all this; you are impotent and cannot put an end to it. *God* sees it all; he is omnipotent, and could end it in a moment. There *is* a reason why he does *not*. You *must* submit in mystery and humility to his supreme wisdom. And finally, should it not contribute to the desire of a better world? and to a more earnest application to all that which may prepare you for it?"

Here we close these observations. These few exemplifications may contribute to show, how those involuntary states of feeling, which come upon us for a time, may be turned to a valuable use; that so we may carry out of the world with us benefits acquired by the divine aid, from all the *mental seasons* through which we shall have passed.

# XI.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF VAIN THOUGHTS.

"*How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?*"—There are some of our duties which are occasional and temporary;—there is in a strict sense, a "time for them," a time marked out from other time. But there are some which are habitual and continual; so that when they are thought of, it is always, "now is the time."

Now it is not implied that any duty is unimportant, any precept insignificant, when we say that there is a peculiarly great importance in those duties which are habitual and continual. Yet it would appear that actually less importance is attached, in general apprehension, to the continual than to what may be called the temporary duties.

In a case of this latter class, the temporary duties, a great deal of importance may seem to be collected into one particular time, and one particular portion of conduct. This particular matter of duty may be such, that there is an extremely obvious good or evil involved in performing or neglecting it; in doing it well or ill; in doing it or the reverse. There is the immediate threatening of bad consequences;—the divine displeasure and a weight of guilt;—perhaps disgrace in society.

Whereas, in a matter of the other class, the continual duties, the duty seems to be thinly diffused over a very wide space, and to be of great and special importance nowhere. The obligation is not peculiarly strong here, nor there, this hour or the next. The guilt of neglecting it at any one time is but as a particle. Therefore the accumulation of guilt is insensible and unalarming; each little portion passes and vanishes away, and is too slight to leave a legible trace on the conscience; so that the innumerable small portions are never felt as collected into the great sum.

The kind of evil reproached in our text comes too much under this latter description. The habit of *vani-*

*ty in the thoughts* may prevail in many persons who would be appalled at the aspect of one great substantial sin, and are not found neglecting the chief, obvious, practical duties of external life. They may little suspect how much duty they are neglecting, or how much guilt they are contracting. They go quietly to repose each night, and hardly recollect to ask for its pardon. Yet a month, a year, or many years, of vain thoughts! in a being preparing for an eternity of seriousness and thought!—it is truly an awful account! Yet with many this stands for little, in comparison with some one or two very wrong external actions. It were, it is true, too vague and fanciful a kind of calculation to pretend to assign the proportion between any given measure of sin in external action, and a long succession of vain thoughts; but it is quite certain that we are all liable to underrate the guilt of the latter.

What a mighty amount of thinking there is in human spirits that does not come under the censure of the Prophet! And do we say this in congratulation of our race? No! It is little cause for satisfaction that a criminal stands unaccused of one degree of guilt because it is a deeper guilt that is imputed. The epithet "*vain*," in its strict acceptation, implies something trifling—light—insignificant—empty. It is therefore not the proper description of *wicked* thoughts. For example, impious thoughts respecting the divine Being;—thoughts formed in the spirit of disapproval, aversion, and rebellion;—thoughts of malignity;—thinking, in order to indulge malevolent dispositions, rancour, revenge;—thinking how to give effect to these dispositions, purposes, devices, schemes, expedients; thoughts intent on wickedness of any kind; dwelling on it with complacency and preference; pursuing it in desire, intention, and project. Such thoughts are of too aggravated evil to be called "vain" thoughts. They are not trivial, idle actions of the mind, but often strong and grave ones: tending powerfully to an effect.

But consider, how much of *this* order of thinking

there is in human minds! So that it looks like a quite minor vision of evils when we turn to the view of the mere vanities of the mind. How striking the reflection, that it looks so only by comparison with something so much worse that there is in human spirits!

Thus, if a good man had been compelled to sojourn awhile among the most atrocious of mankind, cruel savages rioting in blood and the infliction of tortures, as in Dahomey, Mexico, Ashantee: or pirates, desperadoes, and murderers, and at last escaped into the society of frivolous, vain triflers; by force of comparison this might seem almost like innocence and goodness; till he reeollected his rules of judgment and said, "But *this*, too, is bad."

So we see how the case is with the moral state of man! You may fix upon an evil, and by the application of rules rational and divine, see that it is absolutely a great one. But going deeper, you may reduce it to seem as if it were but a slight one, by comparison with something else which you find in man. Thus vain thoughts, compared with vicious, polluted thoughts, malignant thoughts, and blasphemous thoughts. O, the depth to which the investigation and the censure may descend!

We can easily picture to our minds some large neglected mansion in a foreign wilderness; the upper apartments in possession of swarms of disgusting insects;—the lower ones the haunt of savage beasts;—but the lowest, the subterraneous ones, the retreat of serpents, and every loathsome living form of the most deadly venom.

With respect to the jurisdiction of the thoughts, it is an unfavorable circumstance that the man is committed wholly to himself, without external restraint or interference—putting out of view the divine inspection.—His thoughts are his own; they are within a protecting cover; for them he is not exposed to be censured and made ashamed by the inspectors of his outward conduct; often he would be so ashamed, if such a thing could happen as a sudden mental transparency. Un-

der this protection and exemption, it is quite certain that if he shall not exercise a careful government over his thoughts in the fear of God, they will run to vanity, at the least. It is their easiest operation; it is their mere animal play; they hate to carry a weight, except when the passions lay it on. A man may too well verify this by a very little reflective attention.

Observe next, that if the thoughts are left unrestrained to commit folly, they will commit an immensity of it. In this kind of activity, the thinking power is never tired nor exhausted. Think of the rapidity of the train! how sure it is that another, and still another, will instantly come! Think of the endless evolutions, the never-ceasing sport, the confused multiplicity! Never stagnant pool was more prolific of flies, nor the swarm about it more wild and worthless! But what a wretched running to waste of the thinking principle! "*How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?*"

I. These thoughts are "vain" from which we do not, and cannot reap any good; supposing them not of the directly noxious kind. If there be any kind of action by which we should get some good, it is that of our thinking spirit. Well, let a man take a survey over the course of his thoughts for a certain time past; we will say his thoughts in those parts of his time in which his thinking has not been intently and necessarily employed on his indispensable worldly affairs. Let him by a strong act of mind collect the long departed train into one view, not by detail and enumeration—no indeed! but by a comprehensive estimate; and then say "What good? Have they given and left me any thing worth having? what? Have they made me any wiser? wherein? What portion of previous ignorance have they cleared away? In what point is my judgment rectified? What good purpose have they fixed or forwarded? What one thing that was wrong has been corrected? or even more clearly seen how to be corrected? Is it, can it be the fact, that all that succession passed me but as the lights and shadows of an April day? or as the

insects that have flown past me in the air? While ten thousand or a hundred thousand ideas have passed my mind, might I really as well have had none?" To use a humble phrase, what has he got to show for it all? He has kept his mind open to entertain all these passing visitants; they have occupied his faculties, and consumed his time. What! have they all gone away and paid him nothing? Let him see how many, or whether any of that vast number are now retained by him, as valuable additions to the mental store. Whether there be any grains of gold-dust deposited by the stream that has carried down so many millions of particles of mud? Does he even think there were many of the train that he could wish could be brought back and permanently retained? But what should he think of his thoughts, and of the mind that has suffered itself to be so employed, if the case be such that he can be content the myriads of them are gone into oblivion!

II. Those thoughts are likely to be of the "vain" character, which cannot associate in any agreement, with useful and valuable ones. Does a man perceive in himself that if serious useful thoughts happen to be suggested, there is a great tribe within and in possession, that know nothing of these uncouth intruders, except that they are enemies; that can do nothing in conjunction with them, but, on the contrary, resist and overpower them, and divert him away from attending to them? What manner of thoughts can these be? It were a good experiment if a person in the midst of a heedless course of thoughts would suddenly turn to some serious important subject. See what sensation is produced among them! Is it that which would be produced by the sudden entrance of a wise and venerable man among a company of frothy triflers? Then what kind of thoughts are they?

III. Those are "vain thoughts" which it is found absolutely necessary to drive and keep out in order to attend to any serious matter to good purpose; and unhappily often as difficult as it is necessary. Have

you never experienced this necessity and this difficulty? You have perhaps determined and attempted to apply the whole mind's attention to some important matter. But you found yourself like a man sitting down to study in a room filled with a moving, talking, laughing crowd. Is it any better to have such a crowd and confusion within the mind itself, than outside? But you resolutely and indignantly tried again. But again this *mental mob* has forced its way in; surrounded you; baffled you; mocked you; distracted you! A person in such plight might be told; "You should not so long have suffered 'vain thoughts' to 'lodge' within you, that they made the mind, as it were, their own proper abode!"

IV. An obvious description of vain thoughts is, thoughts dwelling largely and habitually on trifling things. Many persons are in a measure saved from this, no thanks to their better will, by the pressure of indispensable business in practical life. But so far as the mind is left to its freedom, there is a sad propensity to waste itself on trifles; and what an infinity of them to waste itself among! All the frivolous cares about personal display! all the idle nothings of fashion and routine! all the vanities of amusement! all the bubble incidents on the stream of society! the endless dance of atoms through the whole air of the moral world! The mind that will give its thoughts away to these, alas for its destiny! Would that some stern alarming voice might often break in upon such thoughts with, "What is all this to thee? hast thou nothing else to think of before thou shalt die and appear before God?"

V. "Vain" are the thoughts that are habitually dwelling on trifling subjects, but still more so, if possible, those that trifle with important ones. Great things may be thought of in a light, careless way, with no sense of their importance; or merely as matters of curiosity and speculation; or merely to throw them into forms of amusing or ludicrous fancy. You have seen sometimes on the surface of water, when rippled by the breeze—you have seen the sun or the stars

reflected in a play of shivered, distorted, fantastic lights. It is so that some vain minds receive the grandest and even most solemn subjects. But let them be warned that there is no transition more tremendous, than that from being amused with the most important objects to the state of feeling that insulted importance avenged.

VI. Another characteristic of vanity in the thoughts is, their not remaining with any continuance on a subject; their fickleness. If suffered, they will start from point to point, with very many removes within a few moments; as if they were afraid of growing to a subject, and remaining fast for ever; or as if afraid of finding any good in a thing to make it worth while to remain a few moments in the contemplation of it. It is infinitely beyond all calculation or prophecy where the thought shall be five minutes hence, unless there be some very favourite topic; and then from the remotest subject it shall in the twinkling of an eye dart upon that. With this exception, there is no tenacity of an object. In this ungoverned state, *any* thing can take away the thought from any thing. There is nothing so great that it might touch upon, that there is any thing too little to draw it away. One thought therefore is of no use for leading profitably to another. There is no regulated connexion and dependence in the train; no rational links; no progressive steps; no leading to an ultimate object. All this vanity there will be in the thoughts, when the course of them is left quite open and free to casualty; when nothing is avoided, repelled, or selected.

VII. But there are vanities of thought of a less fickle character. As when the mind has some specially favourite trifle; some cherished idolized toy; some enchanting particle of this world's dust; some little purpose to be effected, which has grown interesting only by the habit of thinking of it. There is many a mind thus seized upon, and fascinated by some one trifling object—trifling in all but its power of thus possessing itself of a human soul! That captivated soul

has gradually magnified it into a thing of commanding interest; and constantly makes its way to it, in thought, through whatever multitude of other things, small or great. Insomuch that at length all things strangely seem to lead or point to it. If the man could suddenly become a clear-sighted self-observer, he would be amazed to perceive the almost irresistible tendency of his thoughts. Wherefore? Let him soberly make out to himself, what mine of wealth, what reservoir of felicity, what principle of divinity, there can be enclosed within that trifle! And suppose divine wisdom to come in upon him, and he would execrate this vanity of his thoughts—the principle, the spell of this captivation, what should he call it but *the magnetism of Satan?*

VIII. Partly like this is that vanity of which many have to accuse their thoughts, in relation to things perhaps not exactly of the frivolous class, and that justly claim a measure of thought; namely, the tendency to return to them continually, when it is sensibly evident that the thinking more of them can be of no advantage. The thought goes again just in the very same track, and the same length; nor expects to do any more. It makes the same enumeration of things, the same comparison, the same calculation. A person perhaps repeats within himself twenty times over what he has said in some particular case, or heard, or done; he measures fifty times over the probable distance of time to some wished for future event, when he knows that nothing on earth is more useless.

IX. This will often be accompanied by another mode of vain thought, that of allowing the mind to dwell on fancies of how things *might be* or *might have been;* when the plain reality of how they *are* and *must be,* is before us.

X. A wide and aggravated charge of vain thought falls upon men's notions and schemings of worldly felicity. The evil attending and resulting from all this might be exposed as a distinct additional topic of

illustration; but it must in a measure be evident in the mere description of these vanities of the thoughts.

Some suggestions of a corrective discipline might be made on a subject as acceptable, as it is plainly important. But the great point is, that we be desirous in good earnest, to have so pernicious an evil corrected; that our thinking and immortal spirits, which should be temples of the Most High, may not be the degraded recesses of every vanity with which his Spirit cannot dwell.

---

## XIII.

### CORRECTIVES OF VAIN THOUGHTS.

"*How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?*"—The former essay was chiefly a representation of matter of fact.—An attempt to describe the plague of vain thoughts, a mental grievance bearing really no small analogy to one or two of the plagues of Egypt. The description was in too many particulars to allow of any attempt at recapitulation. With all their varieties, however, and compass, and mischief, they stand as but *one class* of the evil thoughts by which the human mind is infested, that of the trifling, empty, impertinent, volatile, useless—as distinguishable from vicious or polluted thoughts, malignant thoughts, and thoughts directly impious.

The evil, the sin and perniciousness of vain thoughts, could not but be manifest in a mere description of them, if at all adequately given. Such a description would necessarily display, as a miserable thing, the waste of the activity of the thinking principle. Consider, that we have need of a profitable use of all this,

and are kept poor by the waste; we cannot afford it. The sun may waste an immense proportion of his beams—the clouds of their showers—but *these* can be spared; there is an infinite opulence still, for all the indispensable purposes of nature. It is not so with our thinking faculty. The most saving use of our thinking power will but imperfectly suffice for the knowledge, sound judgment, and wisdom, which are so very necessary for us, It is wretched, then, that this precious thing, the activity of our thinking spirit, should run to utter waste. It is as if the fine element, GAS, by means of which your city is now lighted, should be suffered to expire into the air without being kindled into light.

This vanity of the thoughts puts us practically out of the relation we are placed in to the highest objects and interests. We are placed in a relation to God—Christ—a future world—to an infinite interest. Now how is this relation to be recognized, to be practically realized to our minds? how *can* it be, but by *thought* of an appropriate kind? The sensible connection of the mind with those great objects, its contact with them, must be by means of there being in it ideas of those objects, ideas in a degree corresponding to their greatness. Certainly, not ideas *alone*, when we are speaking of a saving and happy connection with divine objects, but at all events, *ideas*. Now how are these important and solemn ideas to have any occupancy and hold of the mind when it is filled and dissipated with all the vanities of thought? they cannot abide on the mind, nor come to it in such a state. It is as when, in some regions, a swarm of locusts fills the air, so as to exclude the sun, at once intercepting the light of heaven, and devouring what it should shine on. Thus by ill-regulated thought we are defrauded of what is the supreme value of thought. We amuse ourselves with the flying chaff, careless of the precious grain.

Then if we advert to the important matters of practical duty, it is instantly seen how ill vain thoughts

will serve us *there*. To note but one, the duty of imparting instruction, the social promotion of wisdom. What will ten thousand of these trifling volatile thoughts come to, for explaining any subject, disentangling any perplexity, rectifying any false notion, enforcing any argument, mantaining any truth? It is in vain that the man glances, in recollection and research, through all the idle crowd of his ideas for any thing to avail him. It were like bringing straws, and leaves, and feathers to meet an accompt where silver and gold are required. Such a person feels an inability to concentrate his thoughts to a purpose of social wisdom, when there is a particular occasion to do so, and an extreme repugnance to make the attempt. In consequence, the communications of social life will contribute little to improvement; they will be dissipated among trifling topics; they will be shallow and unprofitable on important ones; they will tend to run quite into levity and folly.

Now if we endeavour to survey in one collective view the modes and characters of this evil habit, and its effects, we behold something utterly unsuited to the condition of the immortal spirit on earth, and fatally at variance with its high destiny. It is here under a great and solemn appointment, advancing into a life of the same duration as that of its Creator. And a prevailing vanity of thought is a flagrant inconsistency with the nature and obligations of this awful predicament. Here is a destination to the magnitude of which the greatest thoughts of the highest created being are inadequate—and a prevailing manner of thinking hardly worthy of a creature whose utmost scope of interest should be to amuse away a few years on earth, and then sink in the dust wholly and for ever!

Now if we are conscious that this vanity of the thoughts is an evil besetting us, shall we not be earnestly desirous that it may be counteracted? If we are, we shall be well disposed to the consideration of any thing that may contribute to the remedy of so

great an evil. Our present business is to offer a few suggestions to this purpose.

But we are to beware of imagining, that for such an evil, there can be any discipline exclusively specific and peculiar; any discipline that should treat the malady as a circumstance only of the state of the mind, separable from its general condition; as in the healing art there are what they call topical complaints, and their appropriate applications.

It is indeed self-evident that the habitual quality of the thoughts will correspond to the general state of the mind. Just left to themselves, to arise and act spontaneously, they would express the very state of the soul, its inclinations, perversions, ignorance, or any better quality there may be in it. So that if the involuntary thoughts could but strike against a mirror, a man might see his mental image.

Therefore no corrective discipline for the thoughts can be effectual that does not apply to the substantial, habitual state of the mind. If there were a spot of marshy ground, which exhaled offensive vapours, it would be ridiculous to think of expedients to be used in the air above it, fumigations, or any such thing; the ground itself must be drained and reclaimed. As to the correction of the mental vice in question, how evident it is that it is not to be a thing to operate solely on the thoughts themselves, rejecting, repelling, substituting, &c., but to operate primarily on *that* in the mind which causes their prevalence. The passions and affections are grand sources of thoughts,—they therefore are to be in a rectified state not tending to produce vain thoughts. The subjects most largely occupying the mind, most effectually "lodged" in it —the measure of valuable knowledge—will have a great effect on even the involuntary thoughts. It is requisite the mind be in a settled state, not essentially tending to vain thoughts; and that there be strong fixed principles adverse to them, so that the case shall be, "I hate vain thoughts." Psalm cxix. 113.

We should here mark a distinction. The evil in question may be seen reversed in a special and partial sense. In some one capacity a man may be in a great measure freed or exempted from the trifling, empty, volatile class of ideas. For instance, a man of science, vigorously disciplined to think, so that few of his ideas absolutely run to waste; or a man of learning; or a man of arduous worldly enterprise. Now this is great and admirable regarded simply in an intellectual view; viewed apart from moral and religious references. The defect may be that his *object* is fatally limited and exclusive; that he leaves out the most important of all duties and interests of an immortal being, and trifles with *them*.

In our exhortation against the vanities of thought, we are regarding a man in his general whole capacity, as related to this world and the next, and we want him to acquire some measure of such a well-ordered habit of thought as directed to all his concerns. In other words, that as a Christian, he should be such, in the discipline of his thinking, as some men are in capacity of worldly schemers, or scholars, or philosophers.

Now, having insisted on it as the primary point that the substantial state of the mind must be cured of vanity, in order to the radical correction of vain thoughts, and always keeping this in remembrance, can we suggest any particular expedients of a discipline against vain thoughts? We must not for a moment fancy there are any expedients that can avail independently of *resolute exertion*. There is no dexterous device to obviate an evil arising from a habitual propensity of the mind: especially when it is added that a habitual propensity will have been in some degree habitually indulged. There is no mental wand of enchantment at the waving of which the infesting swarm shall suddenly die, and the grievance cease. They will but make sport of any single act or signal for scaring them away, that is not part of a regular,

determined, systematic hostility. But as parts and expedients in such a regular persevering discipline, we might suggest a few things serviceable to the purpose.

For instance, it might be a beneficial thing to have certain specified subjects, of serious interest, to turn to when thought is beginning to be dissipated into these vanities; certain subjects might be selected and fixed expressly for this purpose. This might be something *nearer*, as it were, to serve to the purpose, than the merely being sensible that there *are* many important subjects to which I *might* turn my attention. There is a grand assemblage to select from. What a reflection here on the folly and guilt of an indulged vanity of thought! General important truth offers many: choose any one. The memory of matters of fact. Suppose the recollection of a perilous situation and providential interposition. Or the remembrance of a dying scene. There is possibly in the room, the picture of a dead friend. Conscience offers subjects of thought; for example, the record of what a man judges to have been his *greatest sin!* If turning his mind to meet *this* dark aspect, will not check and suspend the vain career, should he not be alarmed at such a power as the vanity has over his mind? Should not even this very alarm be strong enough to produce the desired effect?

Another very simple and obvious expedient would be, for the person to make a sudden charge of guilt on his mind, when the vain thoughts are prevailing; that is, the guilt of being so surrendered to them, and let that charge be accompanied and enforced by the thought "*God sees!*" Just as one has seen sometimes the levity of talk interrupted by an unexpected flash of lightning and clap of thunder. If a man has not left him enough of conscience and right will to do so simple a thing as this, what a pernicious effect he may perceive that his vanity of thought has had! that it has subdued him, reconciled him to its indulgence! If to do this is of no avail, what should he think then?

When it is in solitude that a man feels this plague infesting his mind, and it is then that he is especially liable to it, it were well to have recourse to a direct act of devotion. "A very unfit material," it may be said "are such thoughts for an offering to the Almighty." True, but the sincere petition to be rid of them is a very fit offering. And that presence should be peculiarly the situation in which their vanity and their evil should become most apparent. Especially if they are made the express subject of terms of description and imprecation addressed to Him. How will they appear when we converse with God concerning them? That converse besides may infuse ideas of a better order, adapted to repel or consume the frivolous ones. For we want ideas of a mightier order that may be set against the vanities. As if eagles should drive away the lighter tribes of the air. And where should we obtain these mightier ideas, if not in the divine presence?

The course of vain thoughts might sometimes be interrupted and stopped, by the question, brought to strike, as it were, suddenly on the mind, *What is, just now, my most pressing duty?* "Why it *is*"—judgment and conscience can often tell in one word—*what* it is. "But here now, I am neglecting it, and for the sake of what?"

Sometimes a good temporary resource would be to go directly to some practical occupation; some useful manual operation; the adjustment of some point in a matter of business; or if leisure permits, a short visit to some house of mourning. The mind may thus, in a degree, and for the time, be diverted from vain thoughts; it may baffle and evade the worthless train that was beginning its race. And in the last supposed resource, the *visit*, a stronger perception might be acquired of the impertinence and folly of such mental vanities. Some of them may be recalled, to be placed in comparison with what is there seen and heard.

As a general and habitual expedient of correction, it will be of the very highest use and importance, to

exercise and constrain our thinking to go along with the thoughts of those who have thought the best. Of course this means attentively reading the most valuable books; reading so as to take hold of the meaning, connexion, and design. How forcible the contrary will be felt to be, and the reproach, to the idle nothings of thought! We shall be made to perceive to what admirable purpose the thinking faculty can be worked, and made to perceive what rubbish, and dust, and nuisance is the sort of thinking into which an ungoverened idle spirit will trifle and rove!—Here animadvert on the prevailing *light reading* of the times.—Speaking of such vigorous exercise on a book, we may ask, how much without it will you gain from the Bible?

We are naturally led to another suggestion, for the reform in question, namely, the importance of thinking to a certain purpose, towards a proposed end. It is a chief characteristic of vain thoughts, that they are not in pursuit and progress toward any assigned object; they aim at nothing and come to nothing. A good question to arrest them will be, "What does all this tend to?" But reflect, what a number of things there are which we had need to aim at by the course of thought, in those portions of time in which the mind is left free to think. Then the rule is,—have a marked purpose for the thoughts to be directed towards, and let their direction be in a progress, a regulated advance by steps, in a connected train. A double advantage in this: both that one point will be attained, and the habit of vain thoughts will be corrected. Be intent, in such a progress, on the reason, the *why* and *wherefore*.

We have just said that there are many important things which we should aim at, by the course and exercise of thought. Now it will tend to check and shame these vanities, to reflect seriously and pointedly, in the very midst of them, how utterly worthless they are for those desirable purposes; how many things we have to do that these will not enable us, but the direct

contrary. Then the mortifying reflection, which cannot be too often repeated and aggravated: "What they *have* done for us!" There have been millions of them in my mind—and what result? We have reiterated the words "atoms" and "dust," as types of their worthlessness; but atoms and dust will in length of time form a fruitful soil; lava has been so covered. Worse then is the case with these mental vanities. The infinity of them never deposits a material of fertility; and they impoverish and blast the ground, besides.

Reflect also what would have been the present result of so many good and pertinent thoughts, instead of so many "vain thoughts.."—If a tenth, a fiftieth part of the number; if there had been but comparatively a few grains of gold deposited by the stream that has carried so many particles of mud into the ocean! "Good and pertinent thoughts;" we might try sometimes and verify the difference between such and the vain ones. For we may interrupt those vain ones to consider what would be the best thoughts on the very same subject. What would have been, on this very matter, the ideas of this or the other wise and well-exercised spirit? Sometimes we may perhaps recollect what they actually have been. It were a good expedient to repeat some of the ideas they have so expressed; and then put in words a certain portion of our vain thoughts! But even without such a comparison, think how a portion of such thoughts would sound put in words and spoken aloud. If one hour's train of them had been all spoken aloud, just in the form and order in which they were suffered to run! And if a small company were each to do this, what a community of wisdom it would make!

The mention of "company" reminds us that, for the discipline of the thoughts, a great deal may depend on the company a man keeps. "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise." Proverbs xiii. 20. Society can easily be found in which every vanity of the soul may be indulged and confirmed; and the choosing of it by preference is practically saying, that all this con-

cern of correction and improvement may go to the winds.

If it is objected or complained that such a representation of disciplinary duty involves much that seems hard and difficult, we have but to answer, "Yes, it is just as hard as to justice to a rational and immortal spirit, that is placed here a little while for its improvement, and then must go, where God says it is to go." But if it be so hard and yet so indispensable, how welcome must be that doctrine which promises the help of an almighty Spirit, and invites us to pray for it! What man in the exercise of reason, nay in but the very twilight or moonshine of reason, will not exult to embrace such a doctrine, if he really cares about the progress of his spirit through this short life, and its appointment and employments in another world?

---

## XIV.

### NECESSITY AND RIGHT METHOD OF SELF-EXAMINATION.

"*Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?*"—When the necessity and value of knowledge are thought of, it is readily admitted that *self*-knowledge is about the most necessary of all. From of old it has been accounted a precept of the highest wisdom, "KNOW THYSELF."

Might we not then wonder a little, that there should not be more of this knowledge among men, and more assiduity to acquire it? That attention should be so much averted from this concern? For our general belief is,—that there is but little. Is not this the notion? In a numerous assembly, or in the crowd of a

city, it is presumed, by any one that happens to think of it, that very few, among the numbers round him, have a deep, comprehensive, well-rectified, steady, estimate of themselves,—a true insight. The presumption, or surmise, is understood to go even as far as this; that suppose any number of persons, acquainted with one another,—the judgments they form of one another would, in the whole account, be nearer the truth than those which they entertain of their own selves, notwithstanding the great advantage men have for knowing themselves better than others can.

But if the case be so, how comes it? Can it be, that they do not think it worth while to apply a serious attention to so near and interesting an object? or that they have arbitrary and unsound rules in making the judgment? or, that no rules, nor force of understanding, can preserve their rectitude in the presence of self-love, as if they softened, melted, and lost their edge, in making their way through that warm, investing, protective passion? Or there may be a reluctance to making a rigorous scrutiny, from fear, and thus men remain in ignorance. There may be some apprehension of finding the state of the case less satisfactory than the man is allowing himself to assume it. This may seem like expressing an inconsistency—that a man will not know what he does know. But it is too real and common a case; intimations of something not right are unwillingly perceived; apprehension of what there may be beneath is felt; a man would rather not be sure of the whole truth; would wilfully hope for the best, and so pass off from the doubtful subject, afraid to go too far inward

But here is a most remarkable and strange spectacle! A soul afraid of itself!—afraid of being deeply intimate with itself; of knowing itself; of seeing itself. It is easily apprehended how a human spirit might be afraid of another being,—of another spirit in a human body; apprehensive in being near it,—within reach of its disposition, qualities, and action,—afraid to see and meet the corporeal person it is in; alarmed at what

there may be, or is suspected to be, in that spirit; shrink from approach, communication, or any lure to confidence. "I have a perception of evil omen; a silent warning of danger; there is possible ruin to me in that spirit."

It is easy to apprehend that a human soul might be afraid of a disembodied spirit, evincing its presence by voice or appearance; if it seemed to attend a man in his solitary walk, or to be a temporary visitant in his apartment. It would be an awful companionship! —the revealed proximity of the other world; dark mystery personified—a being presented as if in an equivocal conjunction of life and death; with powers unknown,—and which the mortal can meet with no similar powers! All this, on the supposition that it were a departed human spirit. More than this, if it were deemed a spirit of mightier order.

Such fear of other beings would seem natural enough. But think of a human soul in dread of itself! having had some glimpses of itself, afraid to meet its own full visage—afraid to stay with itself, alone, still, and attentive—afraid of intimate communication, lest the soul should speak out from its inmost recesses! All the while, what it is afraid of is its own very self, from which it is every where and for ever inseparable! A man uneasy and apprehensive in a local situation, or in the presence of other men, may think of escape; but in his own soul! there he is, and is to be perpetually. Then what a predicament, when a man, directly and immediately as being in himself, feels the apprehension of evil and danger!—feels in the presence of something he dreads to abide with, and would fly from; would be glad to separate by a partition—or veil. So that be where he may, with other persons or alone, he has still the inevitable presence, with him and in him, of something with which he cannot be at ease in trusting himself.

We were led into this digression by observing, that one cause of the deficiency of self-knowledge is a fear

of having the full truth disclosed. But now think a moment of the absurd and pernicious operation of such fear. To fear that there may be or is something incompatible with safety, and therefore decline ascertaining it! To fear that the suspected evil may reach further and deeper than the signs distinctly betray,—therefore be careful to keep the alarm less than the evil may be! To fear the suspected evil in reference to its ultimate effects and consequences; and rather to venture those consequences than firmly look to see whether we are approaching them! Not to be willing to see how near is the precipice! In short, to resign and abandon ourselves to be all that we fear,—rather than encounter the self-manifestation and the discipline necessary for a happy change!

But let us still enforce the necessity of self-examination. Let us consider that every one actually stands placed against a standard unseen, but real—that by which God judges,—and marks the spiritual state of every one—the eternal law—the rule of Christian character. Every one stands in some certain, precise, discriminated, relation to this grand rule of judgment. That is his true and exact condition. Think of all our assembly thus placed, ascertained, and judged! If the fact could be an object of sight! or signified by some parallel manifestation to sight! If it were so,—whatever inquisitiveness each might feel respecting the rest, surely his own marked state would be the chief object of his eager attention. Well, but should it be less so when he considers and knows it is so discriminated, marked, signed,—in the sight of God?—that there is the standard,—and some certain degree upon it is *his* degree? Is there any thing in the world so important for him to know; not with the infallible precision which belongs to the judgment of God alone, but with a substantial conformity to truth? There is a manifestation of the divine rule—and there is himself to bring, with all his consciousness, into comparison with it. The state he is in, by the decision of that

rule, is the state of his relations with all that is the most solemn, in heaven and earth, in time and eternity Therefore, "know your own selves."

Let us briefly notice the objects of self-examination. We might ask a man, "What are you most concerned to know of yourself? Is it your leading point to ascertain something in which you hope for a gratification of your vanity or pride? the measure of your talent, your qualifications to shine? your merits as contrasted with the unworthiness, or even the excellence, of other men? your ability and claims to maintain competition with them?" Instead of this, we would advise—Examine in that as to which you are naturally the least inclined to examine yourselves;—that respecting which you are the most afraid to examine;—that which you find self-love constantly endeavouring to draw a veil over;—that which, whenever you do turn the inspection that way,—begins to throw reproach and humiliation; that which you most feel you need to know when you approach the throne of God;—that, any uncertainty about which awakens the most solicitude and apprehension whenever you think of death,—that which forces itself on your attention when you think what the inhabitants of heaven must be.

The earnest force of this examination should fix on the points named by the apostle—"whether ye be in the faith"—whether "Jesus Christ be in you." He was indeed aiming at a particular point in these questions: Had they not proof of his being a true apostle of Christ; and his having brought to them the real religion of Christ; had they not proof in their own personal Christianity? But his appeal equally enforced the question, whether they had a personal experience of Christianity. Let then the self-examiner's earnest inquisition be directed to this great point—"whether" he "be in the faith;" whether he is decidedly more than a cold assenting believer in the Christian doctrines. *That* a man may be, and yet at the same time be in—may be vitally and actively in—a spirit opposite to all these heavenly truths. But

—in the faith? so in it as to be powerfully withdrawn and withheld from the spirit and dominion of the world?—encircled—separated—guarded? So in it—as to have an habitual prevailing order of views, feelings, motives, preferences, purposes, created and animated by it? So in it, as to be in a cordial and zealous league with its faithful adherents?

The other form of expression for the same thing is, "that Jesus Christ is in you." He may be in the thoughts as a commanding object of contemplation. The question for examination will be,—Is he so? He may be in the affections—the object of love, and of awful reverence. Is he so? He may be in the conscience, as an authority. He may be in the soul, in the sense that somewhat of his likeness, his image, is impressed upon it. He may, in short, be established in the soul—in theory, in vital interest, in exclusive reliance, and in hope—as its sole, and all-sufficient, and almighty Redeemer. Thus he shall be in the soul as an indwelling presence, without which it were lifeless and hopeless; by which, it is alive to God, and looks forward to eternal felicity. Now, whether this *be*, in some good measure the case, is matter pre-eminently for self-examination. In all such important points, let men beware of assuming, without the process of "proving."

It should be superfluous to name the necessity of a distinct, strong, steady, apprehension of the pure standard fixed by the divine authority. But how little is this recognized among the multitude amenable to it! It is as if the tables written on Sinai had been subjected to be passed through the camp, for the people to revise, interpolate, erase, or wholly substitute, at their pleasure. Never Jesuit's commentary on the Bible falsified it more, than the world's system of principles perverts or supplants that of the Almighty. This operation began even in Eden, through "the wisdom that is from beneath," and has continued ever since.

Nor would we dwell on the necessity of a habit of reflection. There does seem to be a great defect in

this point, even in the religious community. Is it not too evident, that people's attention and thought mainly go *outward?* insomuch that retiring *inward* would be like retreating into a narrow, dark, desolate, comfortless apartment of a house, or into a prison or a cavern. But there can be no effective self-examination without a resolute and often repeated effort to retire inward, and stay awhile, and pointedly inspect what is there.

Self-examination should not expend its chief exercise on the mere external conduct; for if that alone, in its simple gross sense, were to be taken account of, a well regulated formalist or Pharisee, nay possibly a hypocrite, might go off with considerable self-complacency. However bad the state of the world is in practical morality, it is unquestionable that if we could for a moment suppose the Sovereign Judge to pronounce, separately and exclusively, on the external moral state collectively, and on the internal state,—the latter sentence would be far, very far, the graver and the darker. There are persons innumerable who, if they might be allowed to separate and choose, would instantly and eagerly prefer standing their reward on the ground of their external conduct, to that of their internal state; supposing them to see that state in its true light. You can imagine that often a man has been frightened out of his soul to take refuge in the apparently better quality of his conduct. Any impulse the examiner feels to do so, should warn him to stay awhile longer there—in the interior. It is especially there that the great substance lies of what is wrong, or right, as towards God. All this however does not mean that the external itself can be essentially right, though formally and technically so, any further than the state of the mind is right.

Self-examination should be exercised on a principle of independence, in a considerable degree, on the opinions, the estimates, of others. It is true, that good use may be made of those opinions, whether favourable or hostile—and others' opinions of us may sometimes be more just than our own. But consider nevertheless how those opinions may have a wrong effect,

—in two ways. Suppose they are partial and favourable, to a highly flattering degree. What then? The testimonies of partiality and approbation,—the praise, the flattery,—perhaps the admiration,—will not the man be mightily inclined to take all this for just, even to the utmost point? Will his self-love sound a less musical strain in his ear? If even he had doubted before, to assume so much in his own favour, will he not confidently assume it now? His faults will shrivel, his excellencies will expand, to the dimensions of so flattering an estimate. He will willingly forget to consider, how much of circumstance or fancy there may be in this partiality; and how much there is in him that the partial judges cannot know. But suppose the contrary case,—unfavourable opinion—suspicion—censure—depreciation,—What then? Then, an excitement of all the defensive feelings! Then, all these censures are from ignorance, perverseness, or perhaps even from jealousy and envy! He cherishes the more his beloved self, thus suffering injustice; with an extenuation of what cannot be altogether denied, and a forced magnifying of supposed worthier characteristics. There is, therefore, a necessity for cool, deliberate independence of judgment. This will be promoted by a solemn sense of standing before the judgment of God,—the grand requisite in all self-examination. What does that all-searching infallible Intelligence see and detect?—In that presence, repute, pretensions, semblances, presumptions, excuses, clear away. There the self-examiner—if he will stay there long enough in seriousness and simplicity—is reduced to the very truth. And that this is the case is one cause of the too prevailing reluctance to frequent that presence. This reluctance must be overcome; that is, at least, practically so. Amidst all his slighter judgments of himself, or others' opinions of him, he should still be remembering and saying, "I have to take myself under another inspection," and should often do so.

The self-examiner should avail himself of the circumstances, incidents, occasions, and seasons, which may

aid to reveal him to himself. These things throw transient lights on his internal principles; they come upon his soul by a kind of surprise, and take it unprepared with its undefensive fallacies. His mind comes out simply and unawares for a moment. Let him observe how he is affected, for instance, by some sudden cause of fear;—by some seizure of bodily distemper; by some instance of death near him;—by some flagrant display of irreligion;—by some signal fall and disgrace in a professor of religion;—by some one's acknowledging, with grief and terror, perhaps in a last illness that he had been but deceiving himself with a vain form of religion. At the occurrence of such things, the soul will sometimes give a sudden, involuntary intimation of its state. Such emotions should be recorded and remembered, as well as observed—and such hints and signs should be followed up,—should lead to investigation.

It is a proper admonition, that slight symptoms, what may seem so, should not be disregarded. Say, "How happens that? what may it indicate?" In medical science, what seem slight symptoms are sometimes regarded as of great significance; the skilful judge is struck by their recurrence as indications of something serious, and as deciding what it is.

But the self-examiner should take a comprehensive account, combining the many matters of indication and proof. For if he shall content himself with selecting only some particular points, his self-partiality will almost be certain to choose those which seem the most favourable; and he may be betrayed to make these the interpreters of all the rest, or the substitutes.

Let him especially beware of making some mere doctrinal point the great test and assurance, in self-defence under the absence of immediate experimental and practical evidence.—Conversation between Cromwell and Dr. Goodwin.

It should be strongly enforced that doubt, that uncertainty, ought to be a powerful incentive to self-examination. For surely, the chief questions in the con-

cern cannot be decided too soon. Indeed, to be content to remain in doubt would itself be one of the most ominous signs. If the true state of the case be unhappy and unsafe, it should be distinctly seen, that the soul may be instantly in action. If the state be on the whole such as the Supreme Judge approves, and safe for time and eternity,—who would not in this evil world desire to possess the joy of knowing it to be so?

---

## XV.

### USES AND PERVERSIONS OF CONSCIENCE.

"*The gentiles——having not the law are a law unto themselves: which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another.*"—"Having not the law," that is without a positive law revealed from God: yet there is "a law written in their hearts." The apostle therefore asserts, that man is essentially, by his very nature, a moral being; naturally has some sense of right and wrong; which moral sense operates to two effects; opinions, judgments which men form of one another; and judgments, under the name of "conscience," which they are compelled to form of themselves.

This natural sense of difference between good and evil is made an inseparable companion and supplement to the endowment of reason. If there had not been this principle in the very constitution of man, it is not conceivable how any positive dictates from the Creator and Governor could have sufficed to impart it; that is, in the form of conscience. This natural principle has certain perceptions and powers antece-

dently to the revealed will of God. But, the dictates of that Supreme Authority having been given, this conscience ought to be indefinitely stronger, truer, and more decisive.

A most important principle in our nature, is this conscience, which places us in a sensible connexion with the government of the world. The whole world is under a solemn economy of government and judgment. A mighty spirit of judgment is in sovereign exercise over all, discerning, estimating, approving, or condemning. Now it was requisite there should be something in the soul to recognize this; that it should not be as some vague unperceived element around us; and something more and deeper than the mere simple understanding that such is the fact; a faculty to be impressed, to feel obligation, and awe, and solemn apprehension; something by which the mind shall be compelled to admit the indwelling of what represents a greater power. Conscience is to communicate with something mysteriously great, which is without the soul, and above it, and every where. It is the sense, more explicit or obscure, of standing in judgment before the Almighty. That which makes a man feel so, is a part of himself; so that the struggle against God becomes a struggle with man's own soul. Therefore conscience has often been denominated "the God in man."

This internal judge has not been in the world altogether in vain. Let it but be imagined how many men have wished they could be rid of it. Let it be imagined with how many men it has interfered to disturb and oppose them. Now in most of that vast multitude of cases it may be presumed that conscience has had some restraining effect. It maintained a controversy with them; arrested them; followed them; warned them; threatened them; rose up in them suddenly, at times, to protest or condemn in the name of a higher power. Perhaps in no case this could be wholly without effect. The infinite multitude of criminals would have been still more criminal but for this.

It has often struck an irresolution, a timidity, into the sinner, by which his intention has been frustrated. Its bitter and vindictive reproaches after sin, have prevented so speedy or frequent repetitions of the sin. It has prevented the *whole* man from being gratified by sin; it has been one dissentient power among his faculties, as if, among a company of gay revellers, there should appear one dark and frowning intruder, whom they could neither conciliate nor expel. It has been at hand to approve, attest, apply, the divine declarations, commands, reproofs, and warnings, when sinners have heard them. It has struck on the soul, and said "Listen to *that!*——*that* belongs to *thee!*" An ally, therefore, in men's own minds, to co-operate with those who have faithfully spoken in the name of God. It has served as an interpreter of divine judgments with which men have been visited; not allowed them to be taken as mere natural incidents and phenomena, but judicial and retributive. In many ways, therefore, it has been the justifier of God to men's own minds; the justifier also of the genuine people of God. It has often compelled confessions and disclosures of great importance to truth and justice. Very generally, in the last scene of life, it has constrained men, even bad and irreligious men, to give explicit solemn testimony to the reality of religion, and the guilt and wretchedness of trifling with it.

But better than all this; the force of conscience has often been made effectual to urge men to a persevering application to divine mercy; with a grateful accordance to the method of that mercy, as acting through the mediation of Christ. The guilt is too deep for divine justice to pardon.—There must be some grand expedient as a medium of mercy—and here it is. The virtue, and value, and glory of conscience have also been manifested in its habitual predominance in the spirit and conduct of good men. A good conscience has been the source of unspeakable complacency and delight; it has been mighty in trial and temptation; consolatory under injustice, reproach, and

undeserved ignominy; a sublime energy under persecution for fidelity to God.

Thus far we have the more favourable view of the office and efficacy of conscience. But there is a darker side of the subject;—the view of its perversions and frustration. One most disastrous circumstance is instantly presented to our thoughts, namely, that with by far the greatest number of men that have lived, conscience has been separated from all true knowledge of God. All heathens, of all ages and countries; with but little limitation the same may be said of the Mohammedans; and to a very great extent it is true of the papists. Now, God is both the essential authority of conscience, and the model for its rectitude. What is its condition then, where the One True God is lost from human knowledge? and instead,—an infinite tribe of deities, believed or fancied, and worshipped; their characters exemplifying all varieties of iniquity; their wills dictating a confusion of all absurdities and abominations, blended, indeed, with some better things, which are spoiled and defeated in such combination. Or paganism being disclaimed, there is an essentially falsified notion of the Divine Being, and a perverted apprehension of his will. Think what an authority for conscience to acknowledge and represent, and to be strong and just in virtue of! What will be its allowances,—its dictates, its sanctions? What should it do but correspond to its authorities? With a firm belief in the true God, but with a wrong apprehension of some great principle relative to him, conscience may become the abettor, and even prompter, of the most flagrant iniquities; as in the instance of Paul, and some of the persecutions and exterminations by the papists. "He that killeth you shall think he doeth God service." A perpetrator in the Bartholomew massacre said, "God was obliged to me that day." We need do no more than just name the immense account of idle superstitions, in rites of worship, on which conscience has fixed its most peremptory injunction. Whole days would not

suffice to enumerate even those within the "*Christian* world." Conscience has often been beguiled to admit trifling ceremonies as an expiation of great sins,—or of a whole life of iniquity; when,—had it been in its right state, it would have shaken the whole soul, as with an earthquake.

If such notices be little applicable to us, there are however many that are most seriously so. One important admonition is,—that conscience may suffer itself to be very much conformed to prevailing customs and notions. That which has the concurrence of so many to think, and say, and practise, is easily allowed to become a standard; not it is acknowledged a rigid and perfectly justifying one, but one that may excuse. In spreading and becoming attenuated over the multitude, a censure becomes as nothing. Conscience, that ought ever to be looking to the throne and law of God, may be degraded to this most irreligious homage to man. It has glimpses sometimes indeed, and menacing intimations of a higher authority and law; but suffers a willing relapse, a habitual acquiescence. So that the superior and eternal order of principles is nearly out of sight, as in some countries they rarely see the sun or the stars. When at moments, conscience does attempt to resume a little of the genuine spirit and principles of its office, it is solicited to look out on the world, not the most wicked part of the world, but what may be esteemed a decorous and somewhat respectable part of it, and see whether the common notions, estimates, and practices, do not warrant in me, that which it is disposed to accuse. Le me be tried by my peers! The consequence is as if conscience grew ashamed, and became silent—felt itself convicted of being a *Puritan!*

Observe the next consequence, when this false system is settled in the mind, as right or nearly so,—it is only thence, only beyond that which general custom warrants, that conscience has to begin its jurisdiction and operations, that is, it will have nothing or little to take account of, short of positive vices and crimes.

Therefore it will begin with slight censures at a point where very grave ones ought to have been pronounced. Supposing the whole of what the divine law condemns, and therefore conscience ought to be measured by a scale of one hundred degrees of aggravation,—then the censure beginning at one, will become extremely severe by the time of rising to fifty.—But let this first fifty be struck off, as harmless, in accommodation to the general notions and customs,—what then? Why then,—conscience will but begin, and in slight terms, its censures at the fifty-first degree, and so, at the very top of the scale, will pronounce with but just that emphasis which was due at the point where it began. An exemplification of the effect of taking common notions and prevailing custom as the standard, is given in Bonaparte's estimate of himself.

Conscience is extremely liable to be accommodated to each man's own interests, passions, and tastes. These are the constant favourites of the man's heart; while his conscience is often an unwelcome indweller there. What will he not do to reconcile it or make it submit to them? For *them* he *will* not part with,—and *it* perhaps he finds he *cannot*,—at least not speedily. He has great advantages against his conscience. The favourite interest or inclination he sets in the fairest light; in excuse, he recalls the circumstances that contributed to make it ascendant in him, palliations of what is wrong in it multiply; it is far less culpable than many things in others which they think very venial. He has this and the other good thing to make a great overbalance. But also the thing excepted to by his conscience is far from being wholly wrong. The degree in which it is right is easily magnified to appear the much greater proportion; there is such and such good to which it will turn to account. Now it is not strange if, by this time, his conscience has come to speak in a much more submissive voice. And melancholy as the fact is, there are few things that gratify a corrupt mind more than to have gained a victory over conscience.

Conscience in a great degree may be turned, by effort and art, from the scrutiny of internal principles, to a judgment on bare external actions. The actions, taken simply as such, may have far less to be condemned than the internal principles; perhaps are laudable. Now conscience, by having its dwelling deep within, has a great advantage as a judge, in comparison of outward observers. It is seated with its lamp, down in the hidden world, among the vital sentiments and movements, at the radical depth of the dispositions, at the very springs of action, among the thoughts, motives, intentions, and wishes. The greater the grievance!—But how to obviate it? Expedients are not wanting. Labour to think, that what is practical is of far greater importance than what exists merely in feelings and thoughts. Say, feelings and thoughts are varying and transient; actions are of much more substantial and permanent account. Say, these principles within do injury to none; the right actions do much good. These thoughts and movements within are much involuntary; the outward conduct is the result of will and effort. Look so much on the best parts of the right conduct, as to become emboldened to make the inference—"the case is not so wrong within as conscience had attempted to charge," for "by their fruits shall men be known." Thus in a measure may conscience be beguiled out of its inward watching place, to be content to look only at the outside.

When conscience is seriously alarmed,—it may be quieted by delusive applications. There are painful emotions of guilt; the dreadful sound of the maledictions of the divine law; dread of the righteous inflictions of the Almighty. O that faithful truth, and an invincible power of impression, might come on conscience at such a time!—But how often all this is rendered in vain!—*thus:* "there will be time enough yet for repentance, reformation, and final escape." Or sometimes sophistical reasonings to invalidate every formidable idea of the divine justice. Sometimes these

alarms are calmed and frustrated by treacherous presumptions as to the way of propitiating the Divine Justice; men may reconcile God by repentance, "I have only to be sorry, and all will be set right;" satisfy his demands by a reformed conduct; secure final safety by a careful obedience, instead of a humble recourse exclusively to the all-sufficient work of the Redeemer. This last is a deadly treachery practised on conscience, —for it is quieting its alarms exactly by inducing it to abjure that very law which is its appointed standard, and of which it is its very office to be the representative and sanction.

We have spoken of alarms of conscience; but another melancholy fact respecting conscience is, that it can be reduced to a state of habitual insensibility. There are men in the full vigour of life and activity, body and soul, in whom this sense is in a deep sleep, like death. If this appear desirable, it may be attained!—By means of a practice of tampering and equivocating with it; by a careful avoidance of all that might alarm it; continual neglect of its admonitions; a determined resistance and repression; and habits of sin. The result of this will be a deep torpor and stupefaction of the conscience, so that the whole system that should be under its cognizance is left fatally free; a thousand things that ought to excite it, pass, and it hears not, sees not; the man might go into its retired apartment and look upon it as an enemy dead!—Think of his advantage and triumph, in looking at other men who are troubled by a wakeful, interfering conscience! But does this dead stillness of conscience appear an awful situation? Why does it so?—Because we foresee that it will awake! and with an intensity of life and power proportioned to this long sleep, as if it had been growing gigantic during its slumber. It will rise up with all that superiority of vigour with which the body will rise at the resurrection. It will awake!—probably in the last hours of life. But if not,—it will nevertheless awake!—In the other world there is something which will certainly

awake it,—at the last day!—If a man feels it going to slumber, he should just listen to it while it warns him that it will awake! Its last emotions that disturb him he should interpret as such a prediction. And let him consider that during its slumber, there will have been the more rapid accumulation of what it is to take account of.

We close with a word respecting the right treatment of conscience. It should be regarded with deep respect,—even its least intimations attended to—not slighted as scrupulous impertinencies—blown away, &c.—We should diligently aim at a true judgment of things, because our judgment is the rule by which conscience will proceed. There must be much reflection, in the proper sense of the word, and retirement. We should recollect always that, on the whole, the most judicial conscience is less rigid and comprehensive than the divine law; less so than the judgment of God. —"If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart." Therefore in consulting conscience, we should endeavour to realize to ourselves the Divine presence. We should seek and implore, that our consciences may ever be in the Divine keeping rather than our own.

We often speak of the improvements in the Christian life,—improvements indispensable as evidence that any real progress is made,—be it remembered, that one of them is, an improvement in the discerning sensibility, and extent of jurisdiction of conscience. If this very improvement will have its evils,—as involving an increase of solicitudes, pains, penitential emotions, so much the more desirable will appear that better world where there is no possibility of sin, where the continued improvment of spiritual perception will be a continually augmented exquisiteness of the felicity.

## XVI.

### FORMALITY AND REMISSNESS IN PRAYER.

"*Thou restrainest prayer before God.*"—This is one of the many censures that Job's friends passed upon him,—and it was not a just charge in the instance to which it was applied. But, if it had been true as a fact, it surely would have fixed on Job a sentence of guilt. He could not be convicted of the *fact* without being convicted of *sin*. For, we do not expect to hear it asserted that prayer is not a duty. Whatever the practice may seem to say, there will seldom be an avowal in words of this opinion. Nevertheless, such an assertion has been ventured, and by persons not formally and absolutely avowing rejection and contempt of religion; but even pretending perhaps to render the greater honour to the divine Majesty,—to acknowledge in a more enlightened manner his sovereignty, wisdom, and goodness. They have said, "It were idle and impious to imagine that representations made from *us* should direct the divine wisdom, or have any influence on the divine determinations; therefore to petition is at least absurd."

Now even though no valid answer could be made to this, one would be irresistibly persuaded that persons dwelling with complacency on such an argument, cared for the most part very little about the divine mercy. Those that did so care, in spite of the argument would be continually prompted to pray, and would regret to think it should be improper, or be in vain.

To a believer in revelation, it is answer enough that prayer is most positively enjoined, as a primary duty of religion; a duty strictly in itself, as the proper manner of acknowledging the supremacy of God, and our dependence. Let it be added, that it has been the universal practice of devout men from the earliest time

till the present hour; and practised the most by the men incontestably the most pious and holy. But if there were any force in the supposed objection, we do not see how these good men could be acquitted of gross impiety.

Independently of these considerations, the divine injunctions, and the constant practice of the best men, we might take the matter on more general grounds, and observe that—prayer cannot be discountenanced on any principle which would not repress and condemn all earnest religious desires. Consider the exercise of thought and affection in a mind deeply concerned about religion. It dwells upon the thought of the divine favour, "how glorious a felicity to enjoy that!" But then an earnest desire arises, "Oh let it be mine!" It dwells upon the redeeming work of Christ; and the desire is, "Let *me* be interested in it, to its whole glorious extent!" Or upon the pardon of sin; the purification of a corrupt nature; divine guidance, illumination, and protection; and the desire is, "Let these be granted to me!" Now consider these desires; they are indulged under the direct sense of the presence and observance of God, and are the more fervently indulged, the more impressive is that sense, and indulged with a complacency in the thought that he knows them. But would it not be absurd to indulge them, if it be absurd to express them? And worse than absurd, for what are they less, according to the objection, than impulses to control the divine determinations and conduct? For these desires will absolutely ascend toward Him. But we all know that these desires are good, that they are vital and essential to religion, insomuch that the degree in which they prevail in the soul, is the degree in which religion prevails there. But if these feelings be the essential spirit of religion, it is consistent that they be carried into a direct *act* of religion, namely prayer.

It is the grand object to augment these desires. Well then here too is evidence in favour of prayer. For it must operate to make them more strong, more

vivid, more solemn, more prolonged, and more definite as to their objects. Forming them into expressions to God will concentrate the soul in them, and upon these objects. Soliciting to them by an express act, the immediate attention of the Almighty Intelligence, must combine them with the feeling regarding Him; it must partly have the same effect as if we were expecting to be soon placed in his presence by death.

As to the objection that we cannot alter the divine determinations, and, that if the things desired are proper to be given to us, he will give them, and if not so, he will not;—it may well be supposed, that it is according to the divine determinations that good things shall not be given to those that will not petition for them; that there shall be this expression of dependence, and acknowledgment of the divine supremacy; that those that will not petition are, by this proof, in no proper state of mind to receive the good gifts; that he has made it an indispensable circumstance, a condition, that they shall pray for them, in order to obtain. On general grounds of reason this may well be supposed to be the case; but, the moment we turn to revelation we find that it actually is so. "I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them;" and doubtless experience and fact would bring a full testimony to the same effect. Suppose two men to pass through life, both acknowledging that all good must come from God. But the one acts on the sort of philosophic principle that disowns prayer; the other habitually and fervently petitions the Almighty, in the name of Jesus Christ. We may refer it to any man to judge of the comparative account of what these two respectively will have obtained by the time they come to the end of life. We might also refer it to any man, which of the situations he would prefer to be in, in looking forward to that period.

But we need not have enlarged on such a matter as the assertion of the propriety of prayer! It may be presumed we are under the full and irresistible conviction that men ought to implore the mercies of

"the God of heaven;" that this is an homage absolutely due to Him; and that for ourselves it is indispensable, and infinitely beneficial. If we could go deep enough in thought, it would strike us as an amazing and inexpressibly delightful circumstance, in the economy of the Almighty Being, that there is an assigned ground, and a perfectly accessible one, for meeting immediately the Supreme Being; that there is a permission and appointed duty, to such creatures as we are, to speak directly to him, at any time, on any subject. Men speak to one another; some of them may not speak to some others of them; but the least, the humblest, the meanest, may speak to Him that made and commands all things!

Now then for the manner in which men avail themselves of this most sublime circumstance in their condition. Let us for one moment suppose that we could be quite uninformed of the actual state of our race, in this particular respect; knowing only just the general facts that they are rational, accountable, immortal, wholly dependent on the Almighty, and every moment experiencing his beneficence; and knowing also that they have the grand privilege we have described. What might we expect in conformity to this their condition? Evidently, an universal prevalence of a devotional spirit; a grateful habitual recourse to their most glorious privilege! Now then let us by all means deny the doctrine, and the fact, of the radical depravity of human nature, when we come to contemplate the actual state and practice of mankind in respect to the matter in question;—I repeat, let us boldly and firmly deny it, if we *can* in front of the facts of the case.

Hundreds of millions are paying homage to insensible substances, phantasms, or devils. Many millions are literally making to themselves an amusement and a sport of shows and vain ceremonies of a religion pretended to be in homage to the true God. But come to what is accounted the most privileged, instructed, and Christianized portion of mankind, our

own nation. There are millions of them that practise no worship, no prayer at all, in any manner; they are entirely "without God in the world." Assemble them in imagination, and look upon them! To say to but one of these, in the full and entire sense, "Thou restrainest prayer!" is pronouncing upon him an awful charge, is predicting an awful doom. Consider that to pronounce deliberately but this one short sentence upon each one in our land to whom it is applicable, would take many years! But then reflect, what it is that you would be pronouncing in each single instance. Think what it includes when said of a being standing in such relations as he does to God; and with death, judgment, and eternity before him! You are pronouncing that,—he habitually scorns the Almighty—his soul, and the happiness of eternity; that,—he deliberately keeps himself detached from all that could save him from plunging into perdition!

If we could cast an all-penetrating look through what is performed under a semblance and name of prayer; the slight formalities of it in private; the public ceremonial performances. Would it not be the mere affectation of charity to doubt whether it be the fact, that a vast majority of the performers never pray at all? If it might, by Him that knows, be revealed to you in how many instances, a vital earnest breathing of soul goes out to Him, would you not, in terror and pity, decline such knowledge? "Let me not see the proofs against my fellow-mortals, of what I already too sadly believe."

But it was not so much our purpose to animadvert on the entire absence of real prayer, as to make a few admonitory observations on the great defectiveness of it in those who do feel its importance, and are not wholly strangers to its genuine exercise. Which of us can assume to stand clearly out of the reach of such admonition? "Thou restrainest prayer before God."

It may well come upon our thoughts to reflect, how much of this exercise, in its genuine quality, there is

or has been in the course of our life habitually. How much do we see marked and distinguished by this sacred colour? How much, as compared with our other exercises of mind and speech? There should be some proportion in things. A matter of pre-eminent importance should not be reduced to occupy some diminutive interstices and corners of the active system. A mere worldly-wise man is seen acting on this principle of proportion in things. Then, as Christians, how is it with us in this important matter?

That which is confessedly the most powerful of all our means and resources for good should not be left nearly out of use, for us to extol the while its great power, and be miserable through a dependence on other means. If the people on the parched tracts along the Nile had a mighty engine for raising the water to irrigate, what would be thought of them for toiling with little earthen vessels, from which the element would almost evaporate while they were carrying it? Now look at our means for good. There is one pre-eminent; just that one that lies nearly unemployed? One image of this sort suggests another. The poor, superstitious multitudes of India believe that their adored river comes from heaven, and they are consistent. They pant to go to it; they have recourse to it with eager devotion; they purify their vessels with it, and themselves; they consider it a precious element in their food; they are happy to be carried to its banks when dying. Now we know that our grand resource of prayer is a blessed privilege granted from heaven, of a peculiarly heavenly quality; where is our consistency, if we are indifferent and sparing in the use of it?

"Thou restrainest prayer before God." Is there a very frequent, or even a prevailing reluctance to it, so that the chief feeling regarding it is but a haunting sense of duty, and of guilt in the neglect? This were a serious cause for alarm, lest all be wrong within. A consciousness like this is a stronger summons to the very exercise itself, than if a host of the dead were to

arise to command it. That man is infatuated if he withholds prayer. What thing more urgent can mortal have to crave than this,—that he should not have to make out the safety of his state under so fearful a sign?

Is it in the course of our days, left to uncertainties whether the exercise shall be attended to or not? Is it considered not a positive, fixed thing, no more to be dispensed with than the daily bread, or the common recurring offices of life? Is the case so that a man might be supposed to say to himself, "I intend to pray to-day, or this morning, or evening; I hope I shall, but I am not certain, I *may* fail." *May* you fail? It is, then, too probable that you *will!* "*May* you"—? then that *may* befall you which will teach you what it *is* to fail of such a duty!—"*May* you"—? then you *may* lose the very last opportunity that will be granted to you!

Is there a habit of letting come first to be attended to, any inferior thing that may offer itself? A man may judge *when* is the fair and proper time for this exercise. When that time is come shall he wait, as if to see whether any thing else will occur to put in its claim, so that the claim of God should be admitted but on the condition that nothing else shall make a claim? He will not have waited long before something *will* come in between, and that will bring something else, and that again some other thing. This great duty is then set aside for an indefinite time, and the disposition lessening at every step, and perhaps the conscience too; and when he reflects, what reproach and shame may he not often feel to think what he has suffered to set it aside! The weight of the reproach should fall, not on the fact merely of the neglect, but on the disposition of mind which could permit it.

"Thou restrainest prayer before God." "Another time, a later hour, will be much more convenient." How many prayers this deception has precluded! "I shall be in a better tone of feeling; my thoughts more composed; there will be less liability to interruption;

such an affair I shall have disposed of, and discharged from my mind. It were even irreverent to approach the divine Majesty just as I now feel." As if that commanded serious effort, required in such approach, were not one of the best expedients for putting the mind in order. Then what does experience say, as to the actual occurrence and improvement of that expected better season? How soon commonly does the seasonable hour come, when the first is easily let to slide by as unseasonable? Is there a disposition to give a ready allowance to pleas for deferring or cutting very short? "*That* will be a fair excuse." "*That* must be attended to immediately." "To delay *that* will be a serious evil." "*That* is a matter of practical duty, for which God will excuse the mental." When in the exercise, a person may detect himself readily recollecting and allowing a call away. What a test of the habitude of the heart is there in all this!

"Thou restrainest prayer before God." In the interval appropriate to this exercise, a man may defer it till very near what he knows must be the end of the allowed time. He may be under obligatory regulations requiring him to meet certain business or engagements at nearly a precise time. Now having this known measured time before him, does he allow himself to pass away the moments that belong to devotion till very near the appointed moment, so that there is time for only a few hurried sentences?

An inconvenient situation for devotional exercise, will often be one of the real evils of life. But here let the question be, Is this circumstance readily seized as a plea to conscience for but little practising the solemn exercise? The man is almost pleased that there *is* such a ground of excuse, and yet laying the whole blame of the omission or slightness on this cause.

This lamentably defective state of mind may be verified again in a mode like this, namely; "I did not very long since employ some moments in prayer; it will not be necessary so very soon again. For a while I am free from the pressure of duty." As if the chief

use of the preceding prayer were its clearing the time forward.

The having engaged in a social act of religion may be assumed as a partial excuse for omitting the private exercise, a kind of acquittance; the share of a social exercise is reckoned enough for the whole tribute from the individual. As if a social tribute were for the purpose of gaining an exemption for each individual.

Sometimes the exercise is made very brief from real unqualified want of interest. Or prayer is delayed from the sense of recent guilt. No wonder there should be an indisposition then. But will mere time wear the guilt away? What will be the best security against renewed sin? Do not defer praying till more guilt come between! Do not, lest death come between!

The charge in the text falls upon the state of feeling which forgets to recognize the value of prayer as an important instrument in the transactions of life. There may be an acknowledgment, in a general way, of its value, but in practice things are left to ordinary resources.

The charge falls too on the indulgence of cares, anxieties, and griefs, with little recourse to this great expedient. We may put the evil charged under the final general description, praying but *so* that there is a consciousness, "This will not do *always*."

This is more than enough for enumeration and description. The few admonitory considerations which we might have added, to enforce a reform, can be little necessary, when the evil is so plainly evident.—It is a privation of whatever state and happiness it is, that is imported by "communion with God."—How much it foregoes the benefits of the intercession of Christ!—It precludes the disposition to refer to the Divine Being in social communications.—It saps a man's moral and Christian courage.—It raises a formidable difficulty in the way of recourse to God on urgent occasions and emergencies.

## XVII.

### WATCHFULNESS AND PRAYER.

"*Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation.*"—This is one of the last sentences uttered by our Lord to his disciples before his death. All he appears to have said to them the remainder of that dreadful night would fill but very few moments. And this circumstance of being nearly the last would seem to give it a peculiar and solemn emphasis. The last,—the end of any prolonged series, if at all important, has some peculiar relation to our most serious feelings; how it finds them out, moves them into exercise,—even men of mirth are somewhat graver!

If the last in an important series is considered with respect to prospect, it is regarded like coming to the brink of a gulf;—if with regard to retrospect, it seems as it were to collect, and stand representative of the importance of all the preceding, as if it had a voice and said, "They all speak this once more by me, that speak the last." In the case of a revered friend and instructor, speaking nearly for the last time, it would seem as if his spirit, before it departed, went back to reanimate, repeat, re-apply all his preceding instructions. It is as if he said, "My spirit cannot come to yours in any new words, any more words; let it henceforward be felt as coming to you in those I have spoken before." And the sentences which he deliberately chose to utter last, would be felt as being instead of, and in some sense having the virtue of, all the other valuable things that he cannot now say.

But in the instance of our Lord, there were other most solemn and affecting circumstances to give emphasis to his last expressions to his disciples. They were uttered under the pressure of a mental agony unparalleled in nature and degree in all time;—in the near anticipation of a corporeal anguish the severest that malignity could devise to inflict; and all this in-

flicted on perfect goodness, and as far as men were concerned inflicted because of that goodness; because he was in perfect antipathy to that moral evil which reigned triumphant, and raged at his interference. All this was voluntarily encountered, not only by an original act of determination, but by an act of determination at each step renewed, and at each step in one sense revocable, if it had been morally possible for him to abandon the object. He said the case was such, and the whole grand design still so depending on his present determination, that myriads of angels would instantly have come at his requisition—and then with a sublime, and awful, and justly vindictive triumph, he could have left the world to destruction! But what had then become of the great purpose on which he came to redeem it? Now all this would afterwards in the minds of his disciples, and should in ours, be associated with his last admonitions. To think how he watched, and prayed, and suffered, and cared for his disciples and mankind, in the hour in which he said it!

The first word of the admonition was pointed at that immediate circumstance that they slept; even those three whom he had selected to go further with him in the melancholy garden for the purpose of their watching with him, even they fell asleep, once and again,—notwithstanding the awful character of the crisis. As if through an overruling appointment to show how completely he was placed, by his nature and his work, out of sympathy and co-operation;—to show that HE was a person, and that *his* was a part—*exclusive and alone.* How true was it that he "trod the wine-press alone!" Often would his disciples, in their subsequent career of apostles, reflect how totally inadequate they had been in all senses, to be in communication with him in that awful hour! But every renewed recollection of the admonition to watch and pray in defence against temptation, would be enforced by powerful and affecting associations.

We leave the strict and literal import of the term

*watching* in the text for that larger sense in which it is so often used for exhortation in the New Testament.

Yet it were not at all impertinent to dwell one moment on the admonition in that literal sense in which our Lord spoke it. It may surely be taken as a reproof of wasting in unnecessary slumber the time which should be employed in praying against temptation. It is at their own cost that any shall regard this as too trivial a thing for admonition and for conscience. Let it be honestly estimated what portion is really necessary for refreshment and health. Then let the comparison be imagined between a person who shall habitually thus consume one hour in the twenty-four, more than this necessary measure, and another who shall save and employ that one hour each day in praying, and especially in praying against temptation. What would the sum of the difference be in a whole life! Think how many temptations that have been yielded to, would have been escaped or overcome had that last hour been so employed! Will any one say, that he has quite time enough still, for this good use, though one of his hours each day be so thrown away? One answer would be, that it may well be doubted whether a person so undervaluing his time will actually employ much of it in this best use. The next observation would be, that it is a signal novelty, and an excepted case, no very honourable exception neither, if there be a man who has decidedly more than enough time for all his duties; he need not be envied by those to whom the Great Master has assigned as much service as they can perform by the improvement of *all* their time.

But now let us consider the precept in its general and comprehensive application. "Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation." There is enjoined here a feeling of apprehension and alarm. It is equivalent to saying—"Do not suffer yourself to be at ease." "Beware of quietly enjoying your life. You are lost if you live without fear." But there is an emotion of the heart against entertaining this state of feeling.

"How grievous is it never to be secure; never to be indulged in the happiness of an easy, unheeding confidence!" It suggests the idea of a place where a man can hardly go to sleep, lest the plunderer or assassin be watching, or hovering near unseen; or of a place where the people can walk out no whither, without suspicion of some lurking danger or enemy not far off; and are to be constantly looking vigilantly and fearfully round; a place where they cannot ascend an eminence, nor wander through a sequestered valley, nor enter a blooming grove, nor even a garden of flowers, without having the image of the serpent, the wild beast, or a more deadly mischief in human shape, as vividly present to the imagination as the visible enemy is to the eye; a place where they would hesitate to enter in at a gate or a door though a friendly countenance, apparently such, were shown there to invite them in. It would be said, who could endure to live in such a place? Then, who can endure to live in this world? for these are but emblems of the condition of danger in which the soul sojourns on earth. Such a picture represents the danger, but fails in the other respect, the apprehensive caution of the sojourners!

For as to moral and spiritual dangers, the greater number seem to have determined to indulge in a careless and almost unlimited confidence. What an amazing account of things, if it were possible to calculate the amount of suspicion, apprehension, vigilance, precaution, and preventive expedient among mankind, and then distinguish that proportion of these which has reference to moral and spiritual dangers! Would it not be as if the race thought themselves threatened on the one side by more than all the plagues of Egypt, and on the other, where their most important interests lie, by merely some clouds of dust? As a natural consequence, they are overrun, and spoiled, and ruined, by what they so little dread and guard against, that is to say, by temptations.

For consider, in obedience to what, in agreement and conformity to what but temptation is it, that the

far greater part of what men are about, is done? After what is done simply for the support of our mortal existence. Look around and see how it is because temptation is acting upon men that they are such, and act so! See how it despotically commands that man; how it beguiles that other; surprises a third; mingles with the better influences acting on a fourth! What but prevailing temptation should make the state of things throughout the moral scene be *thus?* that is, contrary to the divine laws.

Whence is it that temptation is so generally prevailing, so mightily prosperous in its operation? Why does not the soul meet it, as water meets fire? The fearful cause is, that it acts on a nature congenial and accordant to what it offers. It is fuel that meets fire! What says our own experience? Experience at what a cost! That long and most costly lesson has been thrown away upon us, if we can any longer with a heedless confidence trust our natural disposition in such a world. Yes! if we can carelessly trust it, even though the Spirit of God have imparted that infinite blessing—a principle of renovation, a pure principle from heaven, that abhors and fights against the evil as dwelling within or invading from without. But indeed, the indispensable evidence of such a divine principle will be an urgent and effectual sense of the necessity of watching and praying against temptation.

"That ye enter not into temptation." The words seem to say very pointedly—*Beware of the beginning!* for it is in fatal connexion with the next ensuing, and yet conceals what is behind. Since temptation is sure to be early with its beginnings, so too should watching and praying; early in life; early in the day; early in every undertaking! What haste the man must make, that will be beforehand with temptation!

"That ye enter not;" that we do not inattentively admit the first actions of temptation upon us. How important in this reference is self-observation! For want of this, a succession of pernicious impressions shall have been made before the man is aware.

"Enter not;" that is, that we be cautious of ventur-

ing into any thing which we have reason to believe or suspect may soon become temptation. It may be fair and harmless at the outset, but how far on? Can no one be led into sin but by rushing at the very first into what is flagrantly such? "Enter not," that is, that we be considerate how any thing may become temptation. How may it by a natural progress affect the passions after a while? What may very probably fall in and mingle with it? This demands an exercise of discerning foresight.

"That ye enter not;" that is, that we may be quickly alarmed at the indications that a thing is becoming temptation. "Here a questionable effect is beginning upon me; nay, but it is a bad effect." "Certain principles of truth and duty are beginning to slacken their hold on me." Beware of becoming so partial to a thing that this circumstance shall appear a trifling matter. You may have seen such examples; uneasiness has been felt for a while; there may have been a questioning whether to relinquish the object; but the heart grew faster to it. Be cautious of pursuing an evident good in a way in which there must be temptation. Be specially fearful of that where, if there be any good to be obtained, the good is to come afterwards, but the temptation first. If the temptation coming first shall blind my discernment of the good—cool my zeal or destroy my relish of it—if I should stop with the temptation and abandon the good!—and be fearful of that where the temptation is certain and the good only possible, or at best only probable. A dangerous problem this, how much good possible is worth how much temptation certain? Beware of being beguiled in this manner, that a positive unquestionable good can be alleged. In truth it is not this that is the real inducement, but that something connected with that good offers a pleasing temptation which can be entertained under the plea of the good. Be peculiarly suspicious in any case, where all appears pleasing and attractive, and there is nothing for mortification

and self-denial. Let suspicion and alarm be awakened, when we find our minds at work to make out any thing to be innocent against doubt and uneasy conscience. Be careful that when unquestionable duty leads into the way of temptation, we stay not longer near the temptation than we are honestly about the duty. Beware of the kind of companionship that directly leads into temptation. But let no man be beguiled to think he is safe against temptation at the times when his only companion is himself. The whole tempting world may then come to him through the medium of the imagination. The great deep of his own evil heart may then be broken up. In this solitude may come that tempter that came to our Lord in the desert. In truth, unhappily there is no situation or employment in which temptation is not to be apprehended.

What vigilance and prayer are necessary against the sudden violent surprises of temptation! These may come with as little warning almost as the dreadful accidents that befall men's persons. A sudden flash of infernal fire kindles the passions, and prostrates the judgment and conscience. Divine aid *can* come as suddenly as these assaults. But who may confidently rely that it *shall?*

Now think of all this; and then of a heedless, self-trusting, and prayerless habit of mind! What must be the consequence? Serious persons amidst their self-reproachful reflections may be amazed at the preventing goodness of God that still worse has not befallen them. To think how many days and weeks they have begun, how many scenes and occupations passed through, with little of real earnest prayer, little of solicitous conscientious vigilance. How grateful should they be to think how many temptations they have been mercifully kept out of the way of, which they probably would not have resisted! But let them consider whether the proper testimony of that gratitude will be, that henceforward they little care or apply to his heavenly protection. They would have

cause to dread that even if they should not be at length fully and finally given up to evil, they will be suffered to fall into some great iniquity, in order to rouse them by the horrors of guilt. Think solemnly of the frightful extent of the possibilities of falling into sin. And that it is an insult to God to calculate on escaping without the means he has enjoined. "Watch and pray." These must be combined; for watching without prayer were but an impious homage to ourselves. Prayer without watching were but an impious and also absurd homage to God.

What emphatic importance is in the point of being saved from *entering* into temptation; since when a man is fully in it, and under the strength of its influence, there is an end of watching, and an indisposition to pray!

---

## XVIII.

### SOBER-MINDEDNESS.

"*Young men likewise exhort to be sober-minded.*" —It is plain that the exhortation was meant expressly for young men; but when we take the precept in the most general sense which the word in our version, "sober-minded," allows,—it may be presumed that young persons of the other sex will consider themselves as quite within the scope of such counsel.

But,—"sober-minded!"—methinks this, at the first sound, is likely to be one of the least pleasing words in the whole language, to many young persons. To them it will seem as if such a word could come only from old, time-worn people, whose feelings are dried up into a cold, stiffened prudence, which they wish to have reputed as wisdom; persons who, having suf-

fered the extinction of all vivacity in themselves, envy the young for possessing what they have lost.

The word may have suggested ideas of something heavy, spiritless, formal, and calculating; almost mechanical in all pursuits and interests; the image of a person narrow in his notions, plodding in his operations, placed wholly out of sympathy with every thing partaking of ardour, sensibility, adventure, or enthusiasm; and at the same time taking to himself great merit for all this. Are such the ideas that the word "sober-minded" has conveyed to any of the young persons present? What then do you think of him that wrote this injunction, Paul? Was he such a sample of human character? We may then be perfectly sure that Paul's "sober-minded young men" were not to be examples of a sapient formality, of a creeping prudence, of extinguished passions, of a cold aversion to animated interests;—in short, not examples of the negation of any thing that is really graceful and excellent in youth.

A few admonitory observations on such a topic will not be unacceptable. We shall attempt to show, what is the right notion of "sober-mindedness;"—then apply its principles or rules to some of the circumstances of youth;—and suggest a few considerations for the enforcement of that application.

What is it that may properly be called "sober-mindedness?" This is to ask, in other words, What is it that we are all charging the want of upon our fellow-mortals, while we are all censuring, reproaching, or ridiculing them, for folly, absurdity, extravagance, for running into all extremes, for being the sport of fancies, tempers, and passions? Is there any justice in these invectives, which almost every one is uttering every day? What is all this the contrary to? we answer, "Sober-mindedness." But what is the principle and the cause of the difference? What is it that would reduce men from all this to sober-mindedness? Plainly, the effectual predominance of sound reason. That then is the general description of sober-minded-

ness,—that there be in habitual exercise a just judgment of things, and that this judgment be in real effective authority.

There cannot be the required state of mind, unless there be some great master principles, decidedly fixed in the very habit of thinking and feeling—principles applicable to almost all things in our interests and practice—principles so general that many special ones will grow out of them for particular application. So that, whether in youth, or any other age, the man shall be a determined and prepared being,—has certain positive principles combined of judgment and conscience, which are to keep him to a certain state and character, under all circumstances.

We need not attempt to specify many of these principles. One is,—that in all things, and at all events, God is to be obeyed. Another,—that there is the essential distinction of holiness and sin in all conduct, both within the mind, and in external action, and that sin is absolutely a dreadful evil. Another,—that that cannot be right long in which there is no self-denial. Another,—that must not be done which must be repented of. Another,—the future should predominate over the present.

Such things must be established firmly and operatively in the mind. But then how can this be without much and frequent exercise of serious thought? Do such principles grow and establish themselves spontaneously? Alas! let any young person look into his own mind and see! Without much of serious thought, therefore, there cannot be "sober-mindedness."—Therefore there cannot be this required state of mind, if principles are admitted, or practical determinations adopted, from mere impressions of fancy and feeling, perhaps from some casual situation into which a person is thrown; perhaps from the pleasing impression made by some new acquaintance, or a friend, while no account is taken of the whole comprehensive view of the matter; nay, perhaps, the judgment actually withheld from attempting this. Thus we can imagine a

Protestant falling into communication with a man like Fenelon—charmed with such piety and intelligence—carried by this feeling back into the popish church;—no comprehensive view taken of the real character and operations of that church;—no account taken of its essential connection with secularity and ambition,—of its general hostility to true religion,—of the prevailing worthlessness of its priesthood,—of its wicked assumptions, maxims, and impostures,—of its infernal persecutions;—and of all this being the natural result of its very constitution.

No principles can suffice for true "sober-mindedness" in young persons or any others, unless as consciously held as under the sanction and as having the authority of the Supreme Power. Even supposing them intrinsically right, what will that—merely that—avail,—amidst the commotion of the passions, the beguilements of immediate interest, the endless besetment of temptations? Man is not a being to be governed by principles, detached from an overawing power. Set them in the best array that you can in his mind, to fight the evil powers within, and from without, but refuse them weapons from the armoury of heaven;—let no lightning of the divine eye, no thunder of the divine voice, come in testimony and in aid of their operation—and how soon they will be overwhelmed and trampled down! Like the Israelites when deserted of God in their battles, the very ark of God surrendered to the pagans! Always, therefore, it is the earnest solicitude and endeavour of wise men, that the good principles in their minds may be in full communication with the Almighty. Without this fortification and power of the principles, there cannot be that constancy and composed firmness which are the essence of sober-mindedness. For the term must imply a steady tenor of feeling and proceeding, not fluctuating, confused, alternating—and a calm independence of spirit and conduct, not at the mercy of the winds and circumstances,—the opinions and wills,—of the surrounding world; which holds one certain plan and aim, right

onward through all the causes of interference and perversion. But how can this be but by the vital connexion of our governing principles with the unchangeable Spirit? We must feel in them that His finger is upon us, who is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever."

There cannot be a high degree of that well-ordered state, "sober-mindedness," without the person's forming a sound judgment of his own mind. Because that state implies a strong regulation and government, and how can that be exercised without much insight into the mind that is to be governed? If there be an insensibility to the general corruption of the soul, throughout its very nature, how little to the purpose will any scheme of self-government be!

Then there are the special and peculiar circumstances and tendencies; the particular weaknesses or wrong propensities; the liability to some one evil in a strong and dangerous degree. Without an attentive and deep cognizance of things so important, the person enjoined to maintain sober-mindedness will not at all know what he has to do; not know against what he has to maintain it. As if a man should undertake to legislate and govern in a country, in ignorance of the quality of the people; should take it as an easy, straightforward concern, with a community of well-disposed beings; not know that they were partly pagans, partly Mohammedans, and the Christians not much better!

We add a most self-evident thing; that it is of the essence of sober-mindedness to maintain a systematic strong restraint on the passions, fancy, temper, appetites. This was probably the most direct object of the apostle's exhortation to young men. In these respects, it is the very first point of sober-mindedness for youth to be aware how perilous their condition is. They are pleased that they are in this animated season; but it were very strange, if they should not sometimes reflect on its circumstances with a degree of alarm. It would be a fine position, doubtless, for a man to stand on a spot where there was a powerful action of all the ele-

ments almost close around him;—the earth he stood on blooming with flowers—water thrown in impetuous falls and torrents on the one side—some superb fire near at hand on the other—and the winds whirling, as if to exasperate them both; but he would need look carefully to his movements, especially if informed that others carelessly standing there had been whirled into destruction; or if he saw the fact.

Let young persons observe what is actually becoming of those who surrender themselves to their passions and wild propensities. What numbers! Then in themselves observe seriously whither these inward traitors and tempters really tend; and then think whether soberness of mind be not a pearl of great price, and whether there can be any such thing without a systematic self-government.

"Whither things *tend;*" for it is an essential principle of sober-mindedness to judge of things viewed in their *consequences.* Every thing tends and leads to something else, which later thing is caused, or at least affected, by the preceding. Our whole progressive existence is drawn out, so to speak, upon this succession of consequences. The consequence foreseen will determine, or help to determine, the quality of the thing present. The consequences in the matters of human spirit and conduct, can be foreseen. They are both natural, and divinely declared. In the view of a thoughtful mind, the series stretches away into remote prospect. How far does it stretch on? through all life, to death, to judgment, into eternity! The madness, then, of taking a thing just as what it is this hour, day, or even year! This is a thoughtless folly, not to be excused even in early youth. If youth have been but tolerably instructed in their education, they can understand enough to make it their own fault and their sin, to be insensible or unbelieving when consequences are pointed out to them.

It is to young persons that all we have been representing, is to be considered as especially addressed. Now, will the inculcation of sober-mindedness, in so

many grave particulars, be deemed by them a hard and austere statement of their duty? Then let them honestly consider which of these principles they can do without, and yet be safe and happy. Which of them may be safely spared and neglected? Can they do without a prevalence of sound reason in their minds? Some settled, fixed, master-principles to determine judgment, choice, and conduct? Serious consideration, for fixing those principles and applying them? A care not to be misled and carried away by accidental impressions, occasional feelings, and slight partial views of a matter? A sense of the Almighty's sanction and authority in the principles that are to govern them? An attentive observation of the condition of their own minds? An habitual restraint on passions and propensities? A consideration of the consequences of things?—These constitute soberness of mind. Now which of these can they safely do without? Let them consider which they would reject, and then consider what will follow. Shall it be, the solemn acknowledgment of the divine authority? or the necessity of established principles, thoughtfully adopted and firmly held? or the necessity of a careful government of the passions? or the looking forward to consequences? But in truth, it is idle to talk of sparing or rejecting one. For no one of these can be rejected without rejecting them all. They will be all adopted by those young persons who are aware what important use they have for them.

Young persons of any hopefulness will often have serious thoughts about what is to be the main grand purpose of their life. They will be perfectly aware that there is for the object of their existence, something greater, and higher, and ampler, than any mere pleasures of the youthful season; and then the particular pursuits in life to which they may be looking forward. Immense interests are exhibited before them, as immortal natures. It is for them to consider, whether they will be consigned down just merely to this, to be gay and joyous creatures for a few years, and busy

ones the rest? Or whether they shall early in life have a greater purpose and concern, rising above the world, and extending beyond time. Now here is to be the application of those principles we were endeavouring to illustrate; and without them we have ample and deplorable manifestation what the notion and purpose of life in young persons will be.

But this sober-mindedness is necessary for the subordinate schemes and pursuits of life. In the want of it, a young person may form schemes ill adapted to his character, his qualifications, and abilities—or his circumstances. For want of it, many have rushed into wild ill-concerted projects, which have ended disastrously, or frustrated the most laudable designs. What important affair in life can that be, what pursuit, what business, that does not require, or will not be the better for sound reason, solid principles, consideration of consequences, acknowledgment of the divine will?

Companionship and friendly connexions are among the most favourite interests of young persons. Sober-mindedness is eminently important here. Wisdom and goodness are probably not so superabundant throughout the youthful tribe, that a young person may think he can be in no danger. Let young persons consider, that they put themselves, with respect to very important interests, at the command, in no small degree, of their associates. They yield to the effect of sympathy and conformity. They will be rendered more favourably disposed to some things, and more averse to others. Now if it should be that what they are rendered more averse to is, seriousness, piety, the service of God, seeking the good offered by the Redeemer! Let young persons confess to conscience, whether they never feel this effect. But that is purchasing the pleasure at a fearful cost! What is to prevent so disastrous a commerce, but soberness of mind? This would keep them clearly aware that the mere pleasure of friendly association is a trifle as compared with the influence and effect.

Soberness of mind would be of high value to young

people, as to the terms on which they shall stand with what is called *the world.* That is the denomination for a sort of system of maxims, customs, modes, and fashions. It takes upon itself a high and tyrannic authority, if we may judge from the number of submissive slaves. Young people appear early to recognize a kind of conscience and religious reverence towards this authority. They *must* do as *the world* does—dare not presume to be out of the mode—anxiously study the dictate and watch the movement of this "*dread sovereign.*" If there were but half as much attention and submissive feeling toward the Lord of heaven and earth! But think of a person, young or old, revering this stupid idol, and disregarding Him! Now the quality enjoined by the apostle would set a young person above this arrogated authority. He would perceive an infinite quantity of vanity, absurdity, and something still worse, in this domineering system, and assume a dignified independence. Not that such a young person would exhibit himself in a laboured and ostentatious singularity. There is a vast distance between this, and a sedulous, obsequious, and punctilious conformity. The firmly sober-minded young person would, in numerous instances and considerable degrees, set at nought the prescriptions of the despot; would act just as he thought proper; and would have his reason to assign: "I really have something else to do with my time and thoughts, than to study and follow your caprices, modes, and vanities." So much for the situation of young persons *in* the world. For what concerns their preparation to go *out of it,* there is the utmost necessity for every thing implied in sober-mindedness.

Let it not be forgotten, that youth will soon be passed away. Nay, there is even the wish, in its possessors, for the larger portion of it to haste away! A most striking illustration of the vanity of our state on earth! It rapidly runs on to the longed-for age of twenty. But then it retains its impetus of motion, and runs beyond that point as fast as it ran thither. With

what magical fleetness it passes away, till it loses its quality, and *life* is *youth* no more! But in the case of not a few young persons, their youth is appointed to be the whole of their life. Now supposing that, in any particular instance, this were certain and known: in that instance all opinions would agree as to the propriety and necessity of sober-mindedness. The vainest, the giddiest, unless totally ignorant or unbelieving of hereafter, say, "Yes, certainly he or she should be sober-minded." But now judge soberly whether the propriety is *reversed* by the circumstance of *uncertainty;* that a young person *may* only have his youth for the whole of his life. When this *may* be the case, were it not infatuation to live as if it most certainly would not? But assuming that life will be prolonged into the more advanced stages, consider, that then a great change of feeling from that of youth will certainly take place. There will be an altered estimate of many things, and altered feeling; a somewhat changed colour over the scene of life. Experience, disappointment, difficulty, will have begun their process. Now consider; is it not a most ungracious thing, that the altered state of feeling in more advanced life, should come just wholly as disappointment, as mortifying experience, as sober sense forced upon reluctant folly? Whereas, sober-mindedness in youth might have anticipated a great deal; might, through wisdom, have made the change much more smooth; might have caused it to be much less, and less mortifying, and made it less reproachful in reflection on the sanguine delusion of early life. It is a bad sign in youth to be utterly heedless of the dictates of the experience of persons more advanced in life. It is indeed impossible for youth to enter *fully* into the spirit of such experience. But to despise it, to fancy it proceeds entirely from disappointment, mortified feeling, moroseness, or the mere coldness of age, augurs ill—and so these young persons themselves will think, when they, in their turn, come to inculcate the lessons of *their* more aged experience.

We would enforce one more consideration; things will have their *consequences*. If there be a vain, giddy, thoughtless, ill-improved youth, the *effects* of it will *infallibly* come in after life. If there be a neglected understanding, a conscience feebly and rudely constituted, good principles but slightly fixed or even apprehended, an habitual levity of spirit, a chase of frivolities, a surrender to the passions; the natural consequences of these will follow. *What* will they be, when a man is advanced into the field of important and difficult duties? when he shall himself be required to be a counsellor of youth? when he shall be put upon strong trials of both his judgment and conscience; when he shall have to sustain afflictions; when advancing age shall force him to see that he shall ere long have to leave life itself behind? Sometimes happily, even in the advanced life of such a person, the power of religion, the converting Spirit of Christ comes on him, and in a partial measure suspends and reverses these natural consequences of his unhappy youth. But then his bitterest regret is, that it was through such a youth that he advanced into life.

We add one consideration more, which we would press on young minds with peculiar force. They love cheerfulness, spiritedness, vivacity; and they are right. But then! on the supposition of life being prolonged, would they be content to expend away the greatest portion of this animation in the beginning of life? Would they drink out the precious wine of life in the morning, and leave but the dregs for the evening of life's day? If there be any possible way of throwing a large portion of this vital element, this animation, into the latter, the latest part of life, were not that the highest wisdom? Will there be young persons ready to answer gaily and carelessly to this, "Never fear! doubtless there will be spirit and animation enough for the whole length of life, how much soever we riot now." We answer them, "Look whether the fact be so. You know many persons far advanced in age. As to some of them, you happen to know, that in their

youth they were gay and vivacious in a high degree; their spirits blazed away in mirth and amusement; they expended their vivacity without limit or care. 'Never fear!' they said. They have passed through many stages since; but, very naturally, have never applied themselves in earnest to their highest concerns; they have done their best to keep up their spirits as a substitute for that. But how do you behold them *now?* It is true there are instances of great natural animal spirits, where a considerable measure remains even in a late period of an ill-improved life. When it is *merely* this, however, you feel little complacency in seeing it; when you are a little reflective, you revolt from sympathy. But how often you see in the old persons who spent so gay a youth, an extinction of all the fire! Sometimes they try to brighten up for a moment; but they betray an exhaustion and desertion. They are sensible that life is nearly gone by. But its close they cannot bear to think of, no more than when they were young; but have no longer the youthful means of driving away the thought. They are sometimes pensively gloomy; often peevishly and morosely so. Oh! had they but in early life consecrated the animation of their spirits, by giving a larger share of it to God, to reserve it for them! Had they often tempered and repressed the vivacity of their hearts, by solemn thoughts of hereafter, by a vigorous application to wisdom! they might have been fired with spirit and animation now, which not the approach of death could chill or quench! nay, would have burnt the brighter in that formidable atmosphere! Look at this delightful animation in the end of life! Happily there are such examples. *Some signal instance within these walls may occur to your thoughts.* Very advanced life, as full of spirit, and animated sentiment, and ardour, and indefatigable activity, as ever that person's youth could have been, and RELIGION the life of it all!"*

* Mr. Foster referred to Dr. Ryland, Tutor of the Theological Seminary, Bristol; the immediate predecessor of Robert

But to attain this in age, the spirit must be tempered and consecrated in youth. And that wise and happy youth may answer the thoughtless, volatile, gay ones, when they ask, "Why do you thus restrain and repress your lively spirit with grave thoughts and hard exercises?" he may answer, "Because I hope to have vivacity at a period of life, if I reach it, when I fear *you* will be oppressed with gloom."

---

## XIX.

### FALSE GROUNDS OF SUPERIORITY IN HOLINESS.

"*Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou.*"—We are all perfectly well acquainted with the principle, that *self-love* is the first law of nature,—acquainted with it as a maxim; and as a matter of experimental feeling. No one ever waited to be *taught* it as a point of moral truth.

It would be a task requiring very great labour and discrimination, to determine the just extent of this principle; how far, and on what conditions, consistently with eternal rectitude, *the one* human being may prefer himself, and his own interests, to his fellow-creatures and their interests. In *some* manner and degree he inevitably *must* do so. His own being is his only being, and therefore all the interests of existence must centre there. In the midst of a universe of beings, it is still *himself* that is the most interesting object *to* himself.

But then there immediately meets him the solemn law, from the Author of his being, the Perfection and

Hall, as Pastor of the Church, in whose "house of prayer" these Lectures were delivered.

the Judge of all righteousness,—"Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." This cannot be intended in the absolutely and rigorously literal sense; but it *must* be dictated in a meaning which presses severely, all round, on the sphere of exclusive self-love; so severely, as to compress and crush that affection into a grievous narrowness of space; unless it can escape into liberty and action some other way,—in some modified quality. There *is* a way in which it *can* expand and indulge itself without violating the solemn law imposed, namely, that self-love, or self-interest, should be exalted to such a temper, that its gratification, its gratification of *itself*—should actually very much consist in promoting *the welfare of others*. This is benevolence, or charity; and *perfect* benevolence would so combine, as almost to *identify*, the interest a man would feel concerning his own good, with that which he would feel concerning the good of others. Thus self-love, though vitally centering in self, would be continually going out in beneficent exercise on the happiness of others—as self-love; maintaining still *that nature*, it would be going out in this exercise. Self-love and social becoming thus in a very great degree the same, the great law would be fulfilled without repressing and crushing self-love in order to fulfil it. This is a combining, uniting spirit, which makes it *my* happiness that *they* should be happy. But look on mankind, and see whether the self-interest, the self-love, is not generally a dissociating and hostile principle, which is intent on *my* good as dissevered from theirs, and often in contrast to theirs, and at the expense of it.

The hostile quality of self-love is eminently conspicuous in men's *self-estimation*, as in comparison with other men. The very pleasure of self-estimation consists generally—*in what?* not in the sense of being conformed to a certain rule and standard, but of being in assumption superior to certain other persons, invidiously brought into contrast; insomuch that, could it be that *they* should suddenly rise to an equality or su-

periority, it would cause a feeling of mortification as to *myself*, and bitterness against *them*. Think how often men are pleased the most with the *faults* of those with whom they compare themselves. Those are the delectable points which the eager glance fixes upon! Those are the flowers where the honey is found! and what pleasure to detect new ones during the comparison! and what a disposition to detract from the undeniable, better properties in them,—that our own may appear the brighter! What jealousy, mortification, and even hatred, when evident superiority, in worthiness or abilities, may happen to come into comparison! In all manner of departments and professions you see the prevalence of this hostile, malevolent self-estimation.

Even in the advantage of personal appearance, with what internal exultation the acknowledged or self-reputed beauty looks on objects less favoured by the casualty of nature; does not, however, say, "Come not *near* me"—rather, "come," for the sake of *contrast!* Even in such a thing as the raiment and adorning of the body. In every accomplishment, attainment, talent, art, profession. In property, and all that is denominated the favours of fortune. On the strength of such things, what millions of proud emotions there are every day in the hearts of human creatures! THIS is the kind sympathetic fraternity of our depraved race! and in the greatest number of the instances, the point of complacency is, that the good which *I* possess, or think I do, my fellow-mortals do not—those of them that I am comparing myself with. I feel *not*, perhaps, a pleasure that simply and abstractedly they do not possess the good in question; but a pleasure that they are put *below me* in not possessing it; so that it would be a grievance to me that they should possess it, since they then would not be below me; the gratification of *my pride* being a thing far dearer to me than *their happiness*. So intensely base in principle is this pride!

But it may also be mistaken and self-deluded in its

presumption, as to the *fact* of superiority. In many instances, the man who is elated in this pride of superiority may really *not* possess that which he assumes as his just ground for pride—and in the most important case of all, the *very pride itself* is a *proof* that he does not possess the supposed good; that is, in the case of the pride of "holiness," the pride of religious virtue, if we may so express it. The language and spirit of the Prophet's words expose a man as a stranger to true holiness, whatever may be the comparative state between him and the person to whom he thus speaks; and on whatever he may found his arrogant pretensions.

But to think, how a man's ruling vice may befool him to make an ostentation of himself in a certain character which the very ostentation itself is the *proof* that he does not possess! The person addressed in such spirit and terms—"I am holier than thou," might have replied, "*That* might easily be;—I do not wish to make comparisons, but this manner of announcing the fact appears to me a bad sign. Because, holiness implies much communication with God, and I have always understood that *that* tended to abase and humble a man in his own esteem." He might have replied—"What, then, is it a cause of pleasure to you that I should be less holy than yourself? Is holiness something else than goodness? or does goodness exclude benevolence? Would you rather have cause to condemn me than approve? to despise me than love and respect?" Or again—"Stand off," you say; "why, I should have thought that a holy temper of the soul would rather have wished to invite and attract, in order to assimilate; in order to exert a benign and purifying influence.—*That* was the spirit of the most illustrious saints,—and will be of their Lord, when he shall be revealed on the earth. Is it then the aim and use of your holiness to make a kind of god of yourself, for me to stand in awe of, rather than to draw me with you to adore the true God? Do you want to divide the honour with the Supreme Holiness? If

you were an angel the case would not be so. Is not holiness a resemblance, as far as it exists, to God? But *he* does not say to me, 'Stand at a distance, come not near to me.'"

The disposition to arrogate the dignity of holiness, —in other words, of religious worth and excellence, has never become extinct among men, nor the quite consistent disposition to turn it to the use of pride. We specify a few of the many grounds of pretension, on which this assumption of holiness sustains itself, and takes authority for its pride of comparison with other men.

In some instances, an assumption of superior holiness has been made upon the ground of belonging to a certain division, or class, of mankind; a class having its distinction in the circumstance of descent and nativity, or, in some artificial constitution of society. Thus the ancient Jews,—in virtue merely of being Jews. Imagine the worst Jew comparing himself with Aristides, Phocion, or Socrates. The Brahmins, in virtue of a pretended pre-eminently holy descent; an emanation from the head of their creating god. In popish countries, the numerous ecclesiastical class. Something of this even in Protestant England, within a period not altogether gone beyond remembrance. In these instances there has been an assumption of holiness independently of individual personal character. Think of such things as here recounted! What an infamy to perverted human reason, that *any* thing which might leave the individual evidently *bad*, in heart and life, could yet be taken as *constituting him the reverse of bad*, that is, *holy!* An absurdity parallel to transubstantiation. Happily, among *us*, such a pernicious delusion, in a good measure, is done away. We dare not assert that *no* one takes any credit to himself, for example, on the circumstance of belonging to a consecrated profession; or, on the circumstance of descent from an eminently pious ancestry; or of relationship, or friendly connexion, with persons and families of distinguished excellence. But as to

the benefit of this kindred or connexion with the "excellent of the earth," let it be remembered that even "Noah, Daniel, and Job," could not "have saved sons or daughters." In fact, the absence of personal holiness is even still more fatal in such a case. It were a worthy ground of pride—"I am connected or related to persons whose excellence, which I value myself upon, is my condemnation!"

In many periods and places men have reputed themselves "holy" on the ground of a punctilious observance of religious forms and ceremonies, whether of *divine* appointment or human invention. This took the place of the true religious sanctity among the Jews. It is a grand characteristic of paganism. It actually stands instead of religion and morality among the far greater part of the people under the dominion of the Romish church. Superstitious and ceremonial observances have their strong hold on human being in this very delusion, that they will do instead of real piety and morality. A remainder of this sanctioned delusion has continued too apparent among our own people. There has been a great deficiency of decided exertion to explode it. The ignorant people have been allowed, and in many instances expressly warranted, to repose an undue confidence in some rites and external observances. An intrinsic and, as it were, magical virtue in them has been allowed and warranted by many who should have regarded such a delusion with horror, and been zealous to teach them better. But to come to a less superstitious form of the evil. It is to be feared there are some among us who venture a delusive assumption on the ground of a regular attention to the external services of religion; they habitually attend on public worship; are generally seen in the more occasional services of a religious nature; and even maintain some regular forms of religion in the family. On the strength of this, they deem themselves placed at an immeasurable distance from the plainly careless and irreligious part of the community. They know that men ought to have re-

ligion, and they deem this to be sufficiently such. They are therefore on the right side of the essential distinction between godly and ungodly. But we have cause to know that all this may be,—and yet no vital transforming prevalence of religion in the heart; no communion with the Father of spirits and of lights; no penitential, self-abased, affectionate application of the soul to its Redeemer; no tendency to go forth in contemplation of the grand objects of faith. Yet such persons may often indulge in a self-complacent comparison of themselves with other classes of human character. When they are beginning to do so, let them turn to the serious consideration, whether this be a state of mind adapted to harmonize with what we are taught to conceive of the spirit and employments of saints in heaven—and while so little prepared to be associated with that higher order, they may withhold their contempt from a class they see below them.

Another ground of such assumption and pride is general rectitude of practical conduct, separate from the true religious principle of moral excellence. We need not particularize, in the description of such a conduct. Let it be that which shall pass with honour through society, and on the whole, be able to challenge and defy censure. Such a man may behold with proud contempt the paltry sinners around him. This now is the honourable exterior, the practical man; and certainly, in some views, he is a valuable member of society. But, are we to look no deeper? Will *God* look no deeper? All this while, there may be no genuine piety. No real love, and little fear, of God; little of deeply-principled sensibility of conscience. The man, perhaps, idolizes himself, and is determined that his idol shall have respectable attributes. A flagrant blemish would damp his worship. He scorns to do a base, unjust, dishonourable thing, because it is unworthy of him—beneath his dignity. He is resolved, perhaps, to command the respect of mankind; perhaps has resolution enough to act on the sound wisdom that virtue is the best policy. He

has acquired a character for worth,—and is resolved to maintain it. Amidst all this, there is no humiliation before his Sovereign Judge;—no affecting and afflicting consciousness of the perversities of his heart;—no faithful investigation of his motives and principles;—no perception of the numberless practical defects in even his actions;—no profound conviction of his need of the divine mercy and the merits of Christ—and because he has not these, he can freely indulge his pride in comparing himself with his fellow-mortals. But is really *this* "the holiness without which no man shall see the Lord?"

The pride of self-estimation for goodness or holiness, is apt to be betrayed by persons who have preserved a character substantially free from reproach, against those who have, in some known instance, fallen into great sin. It might have been a case in which they were encountered by sudden, or complicated, or very extraordinary temptation, such as all should pray earnestly to be saved from. The delinquent may have penitently deplored the transgression through many subsequent years. It may have contributed to render him cautious and self-diffident ever since; and the subsequent course of conduct may have been exemplary; the painful recollection has often served to repress his temper and restrain his language when he has had to reprehend wrong conduct in others. But it has been often enough seen, that another person who has been happy enough, from whatever cause, *not* to incur any such marked blemish on his character, will assume a tone of high superiority against him, especially if provoked in any case of *competition*, though *he* may never have had the same strength of temptation to combat with;—may never think of ascribing his exemption to any higher cause than his own good principles;—and may be quite destitute of *some* valuable qualities the other possesses. The whole life of this self-applauder may have been little better than a *series of negatives*. His faulty, penitent brother may have done much good. If a man of

ordinary rate had boasted against Peter, that *he* had never dishonoured himself by any crime comparable to denying Christ,—Peter would have answered more in sorrow than in anger; but what would have been thought of such a boaster, telling Peter, "I am holier than thou?"

We notice a very different mode of this proud self-estimation and comparison. A man may have had his mind by some means directed to a speculative knowledge of religious doctrine; may have been drawn into a train of reading, thinking, disputing; may have acquired a large command of topics and arguments. We will suppose that it is valuable knowledge that he has gained; that his opinions are right, and his arguments for them sound. Now we have seen too many unhappy instances, in evidence that all this may be, and yet the man feel little or nothing of the divine and sanctifying power of religious truth. Yet so ready is the speculatist and advocate to take to himself all the dignity and excellence of his subject and his cause, that this man may take up a lofty pretension—if not strictly and formally to "holiness," yet to some meritorious relation to truth and religion; something which authorizes him in a high contempt,—not only of those who know nothing about religion, but also of those who feel its genuine influence and power, when they are feeble in the speculative intelligence of it. He accounts himself to be in the confidence of religion, and that he must be invested with something of its venerable character, when he can so authentically declare its mind.

There is such a thing as a factitious zeal in the active service of religion; and that forms a ground of high pretension. You may have seen examples. Men in restless activity; full of scheme, and expedient, and experiment, and ostentatious enterprise, to promote, apparently, the work of God, the Christian cause; seeming ready to compass sea and land for the purpose. But an attentive observer could easily descry, that the cause of God was a very sec-

ondary concern with them, even at the *best* interpretation. Their grand object, whether they were conscious of it or not, was their own notoriety; and the cause of religion happened to be that which would effectually serve this purpose. "Come see *my* zeal for the Lord of hosts." The successes and progress, real or pretended, of a good cause, were recounted and proclaimed by them in no other form of story, than that of their own exploits for it. Yet even such men could allow themselves in arrogance and pride.

There are a number of persons among professing Christians whose minds are almost ever dwelling on certain high points of doctrine, sought chiefly in the book of God's eternal decrees. And it is on these doctrines that they found, in some manner, an absolute assurance of their being in Christ, in the divine favour, children of God, and therefore as sure of heaven as if they were there. Now God forbid that, with the New Testament before us, and a multitude of pious examples, we should deny, or for an instant doubt, that there is a firm and rational assurance of salvation attainable in this life; or that any one of us should not earnestly *seek* to attain it. But how attained? whereon founded? Do the Scriptures and reason authorize any other principle or process than *this:* that a man do most carefully ascertain what it is that, according to the divine word, constitutes a Christian; and then make a most faithful investigation into the state of his soul and his life, to ascertain whether that which constitutes a Christian be actually there; and *if it be*, to take the *assurance*,—and bless God for the evidence; and bless him for having wrought in them this preternatural character? But the persons we speak of refuse to have the matter placed on this ground. Not wholly indeed perhaps, for they will somewhat equivocate; but in substance they refuse it; and will maintain their assurance independently of it. They describe it nearly as if it had come to them by a distinct, positive, and formal revelation from heaven; setting aside all need of any

such rule of evidence as we have spoken of. We are not ignorant, that men of eminent piety and holiness have often received a kind of blissful *illapses* and irradiations into their souls, bearing to them a mystical testimony, to confirm, and animate into triumph, the assurance founded on evidence. And questionless, elevated and humble piety, in communion with God, will often receive such rays from his countenance. But these devout spirits have been careful not to substitute such confirmatory impressions for the tangible basis of evidence on which the question rested. They recurred to this in their repeated self-examinations and self-judgments; and earnestly insisted on it in their religious instructions. As to the practical influence of this their happy assurance, it has both served to rectify still more highly their conscience and moral principles, and to repress any disposition to a self-righteous arrogance towards persons less favoured in point of religious confidence. Whereas,—some such persons as we are referring to, betray that their assurance, which takes its stand on so lofty a position, independent of a faithful estimate of the heart and life, has an unsanctifying effect; it slackens and narrows the force and compass of the jurisdiction of conscience; and especially, cherishes in them the spirit of self-righteousness. They can look with pride, not with pious gratitude, from a high and privileged condition, on those who are suffering doubts and solicitude respecting their state towards God and a future world.

We also name as one of the things made a ground of pretension and pride,—the experience of elated, ardent, enthusiastic feelings, in some semblance of connexion with religion,—but not really of its genuine inspiration. It is a noble advantage for religion, and for its living subject, when it lights upon a mind of great excitability, and vigorous passions, provided there also be there a solid strength of reason. Even though there be not strong reason, in this mind of strong passions, when it is a genuine, and therefore a

sanctifying, influence of religion that acts upon it, the effects may be most happy, sometimes most admirable. So salutary, so true to its heavenly origin, is the influence of *real piety*, that it does in a measure supply the place and the want of strong reason. It puts the feelings which it actuates in coincidence with correct reason,—even without the standard being distinctly recognized. The passions may be trusted with it, when they could not with any other guardian or tutelar genius: even more safely than with that same reason itself alone. As if a band of agents were put under the direction of an angel instead of a philosopher. But unhappily there are many instances in which the passions are excited to ardour and vehemence, in some sort of relation to the truths of religion, but not under its genuine operation. The passions were waiting in readiness for some stimulus, for any stimulus, for any match, to set them on fire. The grand ideas and images of religion have in them something naturally adapted to produce great excitement. Those ideas have perhaps also been presented to the mind under very particular circumstances and associations, fitted to strike and inflame. So there has been caused a natural, a sort of rudely poetical excitement of the fancy and passions, in connexion with religious ideas, but not under the real sanctifying influence of religion. The want of this holy principle has been betrayed, by an utter dereliction, and rout, and expulsion of sound notions, the while:—by perhaps a most grotesque mixture of low and ludicrous fancies;—by a promptitude of these inflamed passions to turn suddenly to some mischief;—and in the result, by the predominance of a proud contempt in self-comparison with persons of a slow, and grave, and thoughtful, and humble temperament in religion. The proper rebuke to such deluded minds, whenever they may be cool enough to listen to it, is,—"You may be sure *that* is not a truly *pious* ardour, which does not result in humility towards God, —in charity towards your brethren,—and in a fitness

and disposition to prosecute the steady labours and duties of Christian life; in other words, which does not make you the better practical Christian."

It was intended to enforce a few of the general considerations corrective of the delusion and the vice described—but they could be only such as will suggest themselves to every thoughtful mind. For example: a consideration of the holiness of God, and the depth and breadth of his law;—the necessity of a deep knowledge of the heart, and its corruption:—of the grand purpose and end of religion;—the special and peculiar adaptation of the plan of redemption by Jesus Christ to abase men in their own view;—of the manner in which true "holiness" has evinced and displayed itself in the most eminent human examples of it; and the effect which the last judgment will have, *reflectively*, on all men's previous estimates of themselves, and comparisons with one another.

---

## XX.

### RIGHT MODE OF GIVING AND RECEIVING REPROOF.

"*Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?*"—Men commonly assign a number of the persons and things within their sphere to the classes, respectively, of friends and enemies. There are beings that have in them an evil spirit toward us, and there are those that have a good one. It is of very great importance that men rightly account of what are such, friends and enemies, because very much of what men are, and what they do, depends on what they account friends and enemies. Many things

in our notions, tastes, habits, practices, if traced back to the *cause*, are what they are, because such and such men were regarded by us as friends or as enemies.

How disastrous, therefore, that perversity of apprehension through which enemies have so often been accounted friends, and friends enemies! And especially conspicuous has this perversity been in regard to the point suggested by Paul, whether it should be esteemed the part of a friend faithfully to tell men the truth;—and whether the suppression of truth, and the substitution of its opposite, should not be held to mark the character of an enemy.

Advert in your thoughts, to the first temptation in the world,—the first communication to man of opinion and advice, after God had finished speaking. The most gross, and impious, and pernicious falsehood was pronounced; what there was the most absolute evidence must be such. And it was taken for the language of a friend! For what plainer proof can there be that the speaker is regarded as a friend, than that his advice is practically taken, when the taking of it involves the most momentous interests?

How much into the dark this fact plunges us, in respect to the question, "What really was, in kind and degree, the original rectitude of man?" The bare fact proves irresistibly, that too much of what many systematic divines have inconsiderately written, can be no better than poetry.

In exemplification of how men have judged of friends,—how did the world become covered with a deluge of error, but because those were accounted friends who spoke the reverse of truth? Ask again, where and when has it been that flatterers were not admitted and welcomed as friends? What a prodigious singularity in history were it, if there were recorded any nation, or tribe, or city, in which these were generally and practically discouraged and silenced, and honest truth was the way to favour! When ever was it, that honest truth was the obvious expedient of self-interest? Self-inter-

est with men is to be promoted by giving them the persuasion that we are their friends. Well then, has their faithfulness been the way in which men have gone about to make their fellow-mortals esteem them for friends? How often has the amicable state of feeling been broken up by telling the truth, even when done in a proper spirit and manner! The great apostle himself seems not without apprehension of such an effect, sincere as he was, and affectionate, and venerable, and even speaking to them with the authority of God. And still, and always, is not this honest expression of truth one of the most difficult and hazardous things a friend has to do? All which is but one more example to show that, in this world, whatever is the best in a thing, is the most difficult to be had, and to be kept in that thing.

But now, in a general theoretical judgment, men would approve, by implication at least, what is so unwelcome when it comes to the practice.

"*What would you wish your friend to be?*"—"Whatever else, I would wish him to be sincere." Sincere! and what then? What *is* his sincerity? Not a thing simply and silently within himself.

"*What would you wish your friend to be?*"—"That he should take a very genuine interest in my welfare, and be desirous to promote it." Well, and is his sole and sovereign rule for consulting and promoting your welfare to be, that he should always please you? If he deliberately thinks that certain things are true, and that though the representation of them will not sound quite graciously in your ears, it is important to your welfare that they should be pressed on your attention, what is he to do? what will *be* truly seeking to promote your welfare?

"*What would you wish your friend to be?*"—"A person of a clear, sound, discriminating judgment, and a decided preference, in all things, for what is right." Well, but he will exercise this judgment on *you;* and would you not wish to have the benefit of it, so exercised? And his strong, discerning, conscientious preference of what is right,—must he take care never to signify it in

any way that should convey an admonition or reproach to you?

"*What would you wish your friend to be?*"—"That he should not be a man full of self-complacency, a self-idolater, but observant and severe toward *his own* errors and defects." Indeed! and is this the man that is to be quite insensible to *your* defects and faults? is he not to apply the same law? Or if he does perceive and judge, is it his duty to judge, is it his duty to cherish in *you* that very self-complacency which you require he should not have in *himself?* Is he to be content that *you* should be that which you could not tolerate *him* to be?

"*What would you wish your friend to be?*"—"I should wish he were a man that would include me expressly in his petitions to the God of all grace, praying that, among other things, I might be corrected, improved, and delivered from those evils which *he* perceives in me, and God far more clearly."

Well now, are these evils too sacred for any finger but that of God to touch? Are you, with your faults, like the holy ark?—if Uzzah apply a hand he must be smitten! May not the friend venture to say thus to you—"I have prayed for you against such and such things?" Would you be displeased that he would thus gently and seriously excite you to make the same requests yourself? Or at least excite you to think, whether they are not such as you would do well to make, and do well to adopt a corresponding self-discipline? We will but suppose one more answer to the question,

"*What would you wish your friend to be?*"—"I would wish him to be such that, as the last result of my communications with him, a great deal of whatever may be defective and wrong in me shall have been disciplined away." But by what manner of operation, if he is never to hint at such a thing? Is it to be by some moral magic? Or is he to presume no farther than to admonish by example? What! not even if he perceives that that admonition does not take effect? How

many pointed suggestions of his mind is he to withhold from putting into words, in waiting to see whether they will arise in your own thoughts? May he not justly despair of accomplishing much beneficial correction, so long as he must not say that he intends or wishes to do it? so long, in short, as he feels himself in hazard of becoming, in your regard, an "enemy" by telling you the truth?

Thus men will profess, and perhaps unthinkingly believe, that they derive the most essential benefits derivable from a true friend; but if he shall offer to impart them, he becomes an "enemy!" But consider, what an invitation, the while, this temper of mind gives to real enemies;—to the flatterer;—to the designing hypocrite;—to every imposition the mind can put upon itself:—and to the great deceiver of souls; to *any* thing but salutary truth!

The great cause of this perversity and repugnance is, that it cannot be but that plain truth, by whatever voice, must say many things that are unpleasing. All censure is so, as it hurts that most quick, and delicate, and constant of all feelings, *self-love*. Who dares to say in how many points the full unmitigated application of truth to him would *not* be censure? Who dares to say how many of these points might not be struck upon by a clear-sighted friend, that should unreservedly express "the truth?" Hence the disposition to regard him as an "enemy."

Another thing greatly contributing to this feeling toward him is, a want of the real earnest desire to be in all things set right; a kind of hollow truce which is kept up with conscience, with great difficulty, easily disturbed, and the disturbance painful; therefore, "do not, do not come to provoke the enemy within!"

Then, again, there is pride, reacting against a fellow-mortal and fellow-sinner. The man who expresses corrective truth, seems, for the time, to assume a certain kind of superiority. The admonisher, the reprover, seems to assume a capacity partaking of both law-giver and judge,—and this appearance will not be per-

fectly qualified away by any disavowal of all such assumption; nor even by the man's declaring that he is sensible he is at the same time censuring also himself, and is desirous to take to himself the admonition he gives. Still the sentiment of pride is, "What right has a fellow-sinner, with his own defects to be corrected, thus to summon and arraign me before him as in judgment?"

Here how obviously is the consideration suggested, of the importance of a practical *self*-correction, in order to be able to admonish and correct others with dignity and effect.

Another thing against a man's amicable reception in the character of a corrective instructor is, not seldom, a real difference of judgment on the matters in question. When the "friend" ventures to express some accusatory "truth," as he deems it, the answer may be, "I do not admit it to be truth," and, of course, it is possible the respondent may be right. But if he only *thinks* so, he is inclined to take double offence. The corrector both has taken upon him to be a judge and censurer, and has judged and censured wrong. The spirit of defensive hostility rises at once in the accused, and both are prompted to rush into "*a just and necessary war!*" In this case, if it were possible for them to have friendly and Christian temper enough to argue the matter calmly, they might both receive advantage. The one or the other might be convinced of error, and ingenuously acknowledge it, glad to be just so much a gainer. Or more probably, each might come to see reason to admit the other's representation in part, so that they should nearly coincide. The person reprehended might acknowledge the truth and justice to a certain extent, and at the same time succeed in showing the other that there are circumstances and considerations greatly modifying the attributed fault. Is it not mortifying to think how seldom such amicable discussion is permitted by temper and pride to take place, even among good men!

We note only one thing more as tending to excite in

a person hearing unpleasant truth a feeling as toward an "enemy," that is, an unfavourable opinion or surmise, as to the motives of the teller of this truth. If it *is* truth, and useful truth, the motives of him that says it should make no material difference. Even from an enemy real instruction has an undiminished value. As we are constituted, this consideration does make a great difference. But the person reprehended should reflect, how strongly the nature of the case tempts him to think unfavourably of the motives. Let him consider how slowly such surmises are entertained by him when he receives approbation or applause. Such complacent expressions may have been repeatedly received from the person who now for once ventures to utter blame. Was he *then* accounted or suspected for an "enemy?" But is all the assurance and evidence of his being a friend to be annihilated by a few sentences in a different kind of language?

Here, however, it is to be acknowledged that truth may sometimes be spoken in the spirit of an enemy, and for an enemy's purpose; far from any intention to do good, or real love of truth. In many an instance it has been spoken and urged home, for the very purpose of mortifying and tormenting. Sometimes it has been spoken in triumphant revenge for admonitions and reproofs formerly received; for the purpose of precluding a repetition of such unwelcome admonitions, and silencing the monitory voice. It has been uttered in the pure delight of being able to fix the reproach of something wrong on even the best men. It has been deliberately considered and kept back in readiness to be uttered when too late to do any good. It has even been digested and reserved in the mind to be uttered with infernal exultation, to inflict a pang on a person sinking in distress or in death. Let no speaker of truth then, actuated by evil motives, content or acquit himself by being able to say, "It was truth, and nothing but truth, that I expressed."

But setting out of view all such depravity as this,

we shall do well, to insist on a circumstance or two of propriety, in respect to the telling of unpleasant truth.

For one thing, it is self-evident that those who have to do this, should well exercise themselves to understand what they speak of. If this be a rule of propriety generally, in the utterance of thoughts and judgments, it is especially so in respect to those which are to be expressed as reprehensions, directly applied to persons and to friends; where some pain and displeasure may be expected to be caused, and opposition provoked. On such occasions how needful a knowledge of the subject, well-considered opinion, clear representation, pertinent sound argument.

It hardly needs be said, that a real and evident friendly intention is of great avail. It may be added, that there should not be the same stress laid on every thing, that may not be exactly as the corrective instructor thinks it ought. Indeed, many minor things may wisely be altogether passed over.

In presenting admonitory or accusatory truth, it should be the instructor's aim that the authority may be conveyed in the truth itself, and not seem to be assumed by *him* as the *speaker* of it; that he may be the mere conveyer of the force of the subject. You have seen this difference exemplified no doubt. One man, a discreet and modest one, shall keep *himself* as much as he can out of the pleading, and press the essential virtue and argument of the *subject*. Another makes himself prominent in it, so that yielding to the argument shall seem to be yielding to him. His style, expressly or in effect, is this: "I think MY opinion should have some weight in this case." "These arguments are what have satisfied *me*." "If you have any respect for *my* judgment," &c. &c. So that the great point with him is not so much that you should *be convinced*, as that he should have the credit of convincing you.

Once more,—the teller of unpleasing truths should watch to select favourable times and occasions, "*mollia tempora fandi*;"—when an inquisitive or docile

disposition is most apparent;—when some circumstance or topic naturally leads, without formality or abruptness;—when there appears to be in the way the least to put the person reproved in the attitude of pride and hostile self-defence.

It is an unhappy fact, that even among friends, the very reverse of this discreet and benevolent policy very generally prevails. Of all times, it is just in *that* when something has made them angry,—when the state of amicable feeling is for the time broken up, that they speak out the most of the ungracious truth which they have thought at other times. They have thought of it, and wished to say it, but did not know how; they have waited for a favourable occasion, but it never seemed to come; the subject has therefore been brooded over in silence, and perhaps created many an unamicable and unamiable mood, which was not explained. Till at length——! So that "the truth," for we will suppose that there is much truth uttered in this explosion, instead of doing any of the good which it might in a certain manner of communication, records itself, as it were, in deep and lasting mischief. What might, by wisdom and benevolence, have been made to fall as a salutary shower, is gradually collected and darkened till it bursts forth in a violent and destructive tempest. One great mischief of *thus* "telling the truth" is, that it can hardly ever afterwards be said in a conciliating and persuasive manner. *That* subject is thenceforward to be avoided, or but reserved for another storm.

How much it is to be wished that all this could be mended; among friends especially. One thinks that among *them* it should be possible that the system of social communication *might* be constituted on such high principles, that it should be understood as their mutual wish and claim to have the advantage of one another's faithful friendly animadversions. Or that at least, more particular friends might expressly recognize this as a right and obligation. Think, if this were practicable, what a benefit it might be! Consider, how many thoughts there are, in their separate

minds, concerning one another, which would be beneficially corrective, if they could come by some intuition into the other's mind respectively. How often it has occurred to you—"This that is in *my* thoughts when I think of *him*—I do wish it could be in *his*—for I am sure it would have some good effect; that is to say, if it could be in his mind, without being suggested from mine; but as *so* suggested, I cannot be sure it would be at all efficacious." The fear of what our text expresses, still hangs over the mind, and shuts it up from the desired communication. And no wonder, when this has so often been the experience of the most genuine friends, in presenting salutary truth; so often the experience of the worthiest instructors, parents, ministers, philanthropists; of prophets and apostles, of Moses and Paul; nay, of our divine Lord, and Master, and Redeemer himself!

But still, let not the sincere friend suffer himself altogether to despond. And that this task and service of *telling* the truth may not be in vain, and worse, we cannot, in conclusion, too strongly insist on the duty with respect to *hearing* it. Men should be aware, that it is an unfavourable symptom of the state of the mind, when there is an excessive and irritable delicacy as to hearing things which are the contrary of flattery. Is it a *wise* self-love that would thus draw a protective and inviolable line round every thing that is ours; round all the defects and faults we may have, which are our closest and most mischievous enemies? As if a garrison should make a point of most sacredly protecting the very traitors it knows or suspects it has within, because they belong to their town!

The right disposition of mind is, that which desires earnestly "THE TRUTH!"—"THE TRUTH!" in *whatever* manner it may come to us. Not that the manner of its being conveyed is quite indifferent; far from it; but "THE TRUTH," howsoever it come, has its own intrinsic eternal value. And what a fool I am, if I will not take it, and apply it to its use, just because the manner of its coming to me has not pleased me! Even

from an avowed enemy, as it has often been said, we ought to be willing to learn; but surely then, when it is from a friend, a Christian friend!

Recollect the disposition of the psalmist: "Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness; let him reprove me, it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head." Let it be remembered, that there have been many instances in which a friend, silent when he should have spoken, has himself afterwards received the reproof, in serious and pathetic terms, for not having done so, from the person whom he declined to admonish.

If there be those who are of a temperament so painfully and irritably susceptible, that they really can no way bring themselves to be willing to hear corrective truth from others, how strong is the obligation that they should look so much the more severely to themselves.

---

## XXI.

### NOAH AND THE DELUGE.

"*By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.*" —The Apostle was to inculcate the importance and necessity of faith, that is, the assured and efficacious belief of things on the divine testimony, these things not being themselves present, in their own evidence, either to the senses or to reason.

Things unseen; some of them unseen because they are of a spiritual nature; some, because far off in past time; some, because yet in futurity. So wide a sphere must that faith extend to, which is yet absolutely essential to religion. These things,—of so grand a com-

pass and variety,—are to be firmly believed, in the simple intellectual sense;—and more than so, they must be "believed with the heart;" so believed that they shall have their due and commanding influence on the active powers of the soul. This is the required faith; this, from the beginning of the world to the end, is essential to the character of the children of God; a most noble, a sublime power in the human soul,—if it can exist there.

But if there were not examples, it would seem difficult to conceive that such a power can be there, considering how the soul is enclosed in matter, within the bodily senses, and thickly and closely surrounded by material objects; continually occupied and affected by present objects and interests; pressed upon by a thousand matters of present good and evil; and in addition, a fatal contentment for it to be so; a perverse, a deplorable indisposition to go out from and beyond this enclosing sphere of present objects, to converse with God, and an unseen world; and to go forward in solemn thought into hereafter. All this considered,—it would seem as if such a faith as that required were something quite beyond the capacity of our nature, and so it is utterly, except by a divine change wrought upon that nature. Great indeed would the difficulty of such a thing appear. It was well therefore for the apostle to bring in view a splendid assemblage of examples of this faith; real instances, in which faith has been embodied as a living spectacle; showing its possibility, its power, its manner of operation, its worthiness, and its great reward. This assemblage contains, with some exceptions of inferior character, the prime of the ancient world.—Comparison between them and the heroes and demigods of mythology; the heroes, the sages, and the men celebrated for virtue, in the ancient heathen history.—

Very early in the series appears the patriarch Noah, the second grand progenitor of the human race, a pre-eminently conspicuous object,—inasmuch as the whole human world is seen reduced and contracted down to

him and his small family; a very narrow isthmus between a world of men before, and a world after. If but *there* a fatal breach had been made!—If the dart of death had fallen on that one family, in the only inhabited tenement in the world! The frailty of mortality, and its surrounding dangers, were there!—A fire might have kindled there; lightning might have struck; a malignant fever might have seized that little household; one of the formidable beasts there might have broken loose, and the supernatural restraint and spell on its fierce temperament might have been for a moment suspended! There, and thus liable, but for special divine intervention, was all that existed of man on the earth! but for *which* intervention, the vast scheme of Providence for the subsequent ages had been set aside; the appointment of a Redeemer had been frustrated! There, as in a cradle surrounded with perils, was the infancy of the immense population that has spread over the world.

In this great crisis man was preserved. Our complacency in contemplating this great preservation would have been much greater, if man, in the transition, had left his depravity behind, with the ancient and extinguished race. But that was a radical quality —it faithfully and fatally inhered and accompanied! Millions of deaths, and deaths expressly and specially on its account, could not cause IT to die. It lurked in the ark itself, infinitely the most fell and direful serpent that was there. Yet the wickedness of man appears to have been more universal and unmingled in the times before the flood. It seems an exclusive expression when the Lord said to Noah, "Thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation." A nearly solitary individual of determined piety and holiness in such a generation, would be in circumstances to need habitual direct communications from heaven.

Among these communications was one which could not reasonably surprise the patriot,—though it would make a most awful impression. He was "warned of God!" The time of the catastrophe was signified to

him—one hundred and twenty years beforehand. This however would seem to place the event far off, according to men's calculations of time. There was now the trial of the patriarch's faith. Would the Almighty really make a vast blank in his creation? Was the declaration meant for more than a mere general expression of his wrath, a menace to alarm and intimidate? No event the most remotely like this, had ever yet been known in the world. How, by any possibility, was it to take place? As to constructing an enormous vessel, to save himself and all the terrestrial animals, by what means was he to effect any such unparalleled work?—A vessel of burden equal to nearly twenty ships of the line.—While attempting it, would not he be assailed by the universal scorn, and at length by the destructive violence, of the wicked multitude? How were all the various animals to be brought to the receptacle, and kept in order there? And even supposing all this were done, what safety still could there be amidst such a dreadful commotion and confusion of the elements? in such a breaking up of the whole order of nature? Then, is not this apparent revelation from God a visionary fancy, a gloomy delusion?

So might he have mused and questioned with himself. And certainly a case so strange and astonishing did require that he should make sure he had the clearest evidence of a divine communication. He did make sure of this. It was evident to him that it was God that had spoken to him, and he believed the declaration. The proper consequence followed; he was "moved with fear," and he set about the work that was commanded him. Believing, simply believing, is the basis of vital faith; but if this be all, it comes to nothing. It avails and suffices no more than if Noah had contented himself with drawing a plan, or shaping a model of the prescribed ark, and perhaps marking the trees that would serve for the timber. To each belief, relative to important concerns, there is some appropriate affection or passion; and the belief must bring that into exercise. Noah's belief excited

his "fear." And, in concerns involving practice, there is an action appropriate to each belief and corresponding emotion—he "prepared an ark." With this mechanical employment, we are told he combined the "preaching of righteousness" to that wicked and abandoned generation.

"While the ark was preparing." And this mere glimpse of information is all that is given us, of more than a century preceding the most memorable event, except one, of all time; an interval too, during which, doubtless, every thing was in undeviating, unsuspended progress toward the catastrophe. It will often occur to us, in reading of the great events in the sacred history,—how little the divine wisdom judged it necessary for us to know of things which it would have been inexpressibly interesting to know. For instance, —in what manner Noah's announcement of the divine prediction was received; in what measure and manner he was assisted in his mighty labour by the people,—and with what feeling, on their part. Think of the persons employed asking and receiving from him precise directions, about one part and another, with explanations respecting the purpose of it—and all this in the mere temper of workmen! Whether the ark, in its construction, was regarded with absolute indifference, except as an object of scorn, or whether it did strike any of them as an ominous spectacle. To the generality no doubt it afforded endless amusement in their conversations. Whether there were not designs formed and attempted to destroy it, and if so,—whether they were frustrated by sudden strokes of divine vengeance.—A fire from heaven on some profane and daring incendiary.—What might be the strain of Noah's addresses to the people; whether, in rebuking their wickedness, he was authorized to enlarge on offers and promises of mercy to repentance; whether the denunciations of the Almighty were by any means made known to the entire population of the earth; whether his admonitions ceased, or changed their language, when the ark was coming very near its com-

pletion. Our imagination will represent his mingled and profound emotions at seeing thus combined in the same fact the assurance of his safety and of their destruction;—his feelings in placing the last timbers on the structure, and in being perhaps assisted to do it by some of these doomed hands; and looking down from the elevation on numbers gazing with idle curiosity and impious mockery, anticipating with what other feelings and language, ere long, surrounding multitudes would look at this structure, closed and inaccessible!

In looking abroad over the region, while the last beams and planks were in adjusting, he would feel that, in effect, he was preparing the whole earth for one grave of all its inhabitants;—that heaven was arraying him as to be the mournful high priest at a stupendous sacrifice, in which all that had the breath of life was to be offered—at once;—that the time was at hand when, at every breathing of his own, he should be sensible that countless numbers were in the agony of suffocation;—and that yet a little while, and he would find himself in the midst of a silent and solitary world!

But, all this while, perhaps nothing unusual was taking place,—there were no portentous signs, or extraordinary movements. When all was completed, in the structure and the stores, there might be a short interval of inconceivable suspense and expectation. Imagine the emotion at the first decisive indication! Suppose this to be, the voluntary approach and entrance into the ark of a pair of animals, of a species timidly averse, or destructively hostile to man,—coming without the least appearance of fear or ferocity. The shock of an earthquake would not have produced a more powerful sensation than such a first circumstance. Infallible sign that the decree of heaven had not been revoked, and was on the very point of being executed!—This would be followed rapidly, no doubt, by the various animals crowding to the grand receptacle, moved to do so by a supernatural impulse. "They shall come to thee into the ark." This must

have been, to the most hardened unbelievers and scoffers, a portentous sight.

But still, all the land continued dry as usual. When and whence was the water to come? This would be a matter of most fearful inquisitiveness and expectation to the inhabitants of the ark. The intensity of this inquiring expectation would prepare them to behold, at length, with an awful emotion, the heavens blackening over the world, and a rain,—preternatural, perhaps, in its quantity,—and evidently so, after a while, by its unremitting continuance.

Then was the time for all mankind to be "moved with fear,"—but for Noah to fear no longer. Fear, entertained effectually at the earlier season, prevents it at the later. The salutary fear of God, of his displeasure, of his future judgment, seriously admitted, and acted upon, at his first "warnings,"—and especially in early life,—what is its consequence, at later seasons, when calamities come, when the end of life approaches? On the contrary, what is the consequence at last of the early and persevering rejection of that fear, in thoughtlessness or scorn? How many examples are there at all times, that are analogous to those of Noah and the impious multitude, especially analogous to the latter!

"The waters prevailed upon the earth;" overwhelmed all the lower tracts—with all the inhabitants that could not escape thence, and gradually rose upon the eminences. But as to the question, in what manner this was accomplished, we are lost in the profoundest mystery. "Whence could this stupendous accession of water come, and whither return?" is a question which philosophy has in vain tried to answer;—to answer, that is to say, by any thing more than mere conjectural speculation. The only probable conjecture seems to be, that "the great deep" spoken of, the fountains of which were "broken up," is to be understood as a vast reservoir within the globe,—and that this water was made to gush out, in mighty eruptions, through the surface, either by an immediate efficacy

of the divine will, or, much more probably, by the effect of some law of nature extraordinarily applied by Him. This seems the only conjecture that affords any rational, or even conceivable notion, of whence such an enormous mass of water could come, and whither retire.

Any actual proof on the subject must be utterly beyond the reach of science; and He that knows the whole cause and process has not chosen to inform us. But at the same time, besides universal tradition,—there is demonstrative proof of the fact of such a deluge, confirmatory of the sacred history. This evidence is becoming more palpable every year, through the researches and inferences of science. There are found throughout Europe, in Asia and America, and in all parts of the world where the contents of the earth have been explored, both in lower grounds and far up toward the highest, innumerable animal remains, bones, whole skeletons, &c., in such circumstances as to prove, most evidently, that they were deposited and covered there by an overwhelming flood —with a striking similarity to show that it must have been the same flood, and circumstances indicating there had been but one such flood. We are to set out of view here those animal remains that are found far in the solid depths of the earth, in the state of stones, or in the substance of rocks. These our Christian naturalists are now feeling themselves compelled to refer to some far more ancient period, probably long ages before the globe was made the habitation of man.

But return to Noah—and think how solemn a moment that would be, when the ark was perceived to have left the ground! the decided rending of his tie with the world, with all humanity, with the old accustomed economy under which he had lived more than half a thousand years! The world, and all that was on its ample surface, was gone—for him; the dwellings, the plantations, the people, he would see no more! He was committed wholly to a Sovereign

Providence. Ideas of various, altogether new, and almost infinite hazards, would occur to his mind. But it was enough that he had obeyed the Almighty, and was sure of his care. And,—if we may be allowed such an expression—there was a concentration of the cares of Providence on the inhabitants of the ark, since all the other inhabitants of the earth were surrendered to destruction. There converged thither, at that crisis, the providential care which was again to expand with the extension of the human and other races over the now desolated earth.

But think of the awful scene from which Noah was thus borne aloft! For a while, at the beginning, he would hear the sound of it; the cries of terror and despair from the multitude; his own name loudly called upon by voices imploring to be admitted. How ardently desirous then to share the lot of the man whom they had scorned, and whose God they had defied!—But the door was not his to open; God had closed it. "God shut him in." On some tracts of the earth it is probable that the destruction was comparatively sudden. For on the supposition of the impetuous breaking forth, through wide openings, from an abyss below, there would be most tremendous torrents which would drive and sweep with inconceivable violence. It has recently been shown and illustrated, in a most striking manner, that there were such torrents,—streams of such amazing force as to tear mountain ridges asunder, and drive rocks a vast distance along with them. All would soon be over, as to living existence, in the tracts within the immediate power of such tremendous eruptions and torrents. But many of the great elevations would remain many weeks, and some of them even months, high above the flood, and so would afford ground to multitudes of the doomed and despairing people who could escape thither. But think of them! seeing, day after day, the dire enemy still rising,—still approaching,—and the while, many of them perishing with famine! And it were not in the least an improbable imagination, that in many instances there might

break out among them a deadly and infernal frenzy, in which they set upon and destroyed one another,—and the survivors devoured the dead. There is not the least extravagance in it; it is true to the nature of man,—social man, when wicked and reduced to extremity. Recently there has been published an account from Para of a horrible example. The antediluvian world had been "filled with violence," we are told; and there was nothing to extinguish that spirit on the last summits on which men continued alive. We may well believe, that depravity so extreme as to bring an universal destruction from the righteous Governor, would continue depravity to the last; and that the final spark of life might go out in fury!

At length there was the entire surface of the solid globe *without sin!*—But to think that it could not be so but by being *without men!* When all was accomplished, the sovereign dictate repressed the flood, and gradually sent its tumultuous waters to the dark hiding place from which he had called them. The ark, in a place probably far off from where it had been built, touched the ground once more, and Noah and his family had to reflect what had been done since it had last touched the ground!—After a confinement of a complete year, he was summoned to come forth, with all the beings of which he had been made the guardian so long. When he was delivered from the incessant, complicated cares and toils of this great charge, his thoughts would be more free to expatiate in solemn meditation.

Where was all he had been accustomed to behold, for six hundred years, and that was around him the last year at this time? The numbers of men—the towns—the camps—the arts, the works, the revels, the crimes, the very face of nature itself?—All swept from the creation! A deserted, desolate planet that *had* been populous in God's creation! Nothing short of having gone to another world could be so strange.

For SIN this mighty destruction had passed over the world! How he would deprecate the return of this

dreadful cause with the renewed population, on the new face of the earth! "As *man* has expired, oh that *sin* also might be dead!"

What an awful sentiment he would feel toward the righteous Governor,—at such a demonstration that He will be righteous, at whatever cost to any rebellious and unholy part of his creation,—that there shall be holiness, or there must be vengeance! Noah might feel a grateful wonder why he, with his family should have been the one to be divinely preserved from the wickedness of mankind, in order to be saved from their destruction, and to be made the origin of a new race. Would he assume it as a ground of pride?—He did well to begin by "building an altar to the Lord," and offering devout sacrifices. But the ark—would not that be to him, as long as it remained undecayed, a favourite and peculiarly solemn temple in which to adore the Almighty? It had been built in holy "fear;" it had been built in "faith;" it had answered to his faith; had fulfilled the promise; had been the effectual medium of his temporal salvation. Every sight of it would renew the admonition and conviction that God is true,—both in his threatenings and his promises. Since his was not a faith of merely temporal reference, but extended to the concern of an infinitely greater salvation, the ark would be a most striking emblem to him of that grand and sole appointed expedient for the exemption of the soul from a more awful destruction—the "manifestation of the Son of God in the flesh."

To this sovereign refuge was he also "moved by fear;" fear of a danger transcendently more dreadful than any that could fall from the tempestuous skies, or ascend from "the fountains of the great deep." *Our* only effectual faith is that in which, "moved by fear," we hasten to HIM that is all-sufficient to save, with all the solemn earnestness with which the patriarch applied himself to prepare the ark.

## XXII.

### DESTRUCTION OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH.

"*The Lord appeared to Abraham in the plains of Mamre; and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day.*"—The nineteenth chapter of Genesis contains the narrative of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and other cities of the vale of Siddim. We have made some reflections on the beauty spread over the earth, especially in the season of Spring—and the sad contrast between the beauty of nature, and the moral quality mingled through the scene. There is no need of ancient and foreign illustrations; but a very striking one is that vale of Siddim. Lot had beheld it "as the garden of the Lord," and was so captivated, that he chose it for his sojourn, even with the certainty that "his righteous soul" must be "vexed."

Think of a region blooming and smiling in all the riches of nature;—on every hand something to raise the contemplative thought to the glorious Creator;—something, it might be supposed, to refine and harmonize the sentiments;—and a copious fertility of supply, to make every tract speak the bounty of providence.

But amidst all this, *what was* MAN? A hideous assemblage of beings, "sensual—devilish,"—such as might almost be conceived to have been thrown up from the infernal realms, to go down again in an earthquake and tempest of fire! The wickedness was so aggravated and extreme, that the region itself was doomed to perish with the inhabitants. As if divine justice could not permit to remain under the face of heaven, the very ground which had been polluted by such a race! Beautiful scenery remained, spread over the world; but *one* portion was sunk and vanished for ever. The natural beauty, and the human

wickedness were both struck out of the world at one tremendous blow. At that one spot it is nearly four thousand years since nature bloomed and man sinned, —for the last time!

So terrible a judgment and warning, however, has not prevented *sin* from infecting ever since the fair field of nature; and it is this which spoils the beauty of the scene. This thing that spoils it so, is incomparably stronger and more intense in its quality of deformity, than the other in its quality of beauty. That there is a luxuriant verdure,—that there are flowers—rich fields—fruitful trees—pleasing sounds, and tastes, and odours—streams—soft gales—picturesque landscapes—what is all this as set against the other fact, that there are—in almost infinite mass, and number, and variety—bad dispositions and passions—bad principles — wicked thoughts — vile language — impieties and crimes of all *possible* kinds? We are not forgetting that there are also *better* things than these in the moral world; but of *these* there is enough to form an overwhelming contrast to all that which could make the world look "as the garden of the Lord." So that on the supposition, if we might be allowed such an idea, that all the sin could become a *visible* thing, a thing palpable to the senses, in forms and characteristics duly representing its odious and dreadful quality, it would blast and overpower in our view all the beauty of nature.

It may be that "the angels of the Lord," so much spoken of in this early part of the Bible, and throughout it, may have such a power and mode of apprehension, as to behold sin in as palpable a manifestation, here on earth, as the face and forms of the material world itself; except perhaps sin as latent within the soul. But they would hardly need the exquisite intuition, and the capacity of angelic faculty, to apprehend the character of a scene like that of Sodom and Gomorrah. Wicked as all the nations of those lands were, the people of this one tract appear to have surpassed the rest in atrocity. "The Lord said, the cry

of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and their sin is very grievous." The insults to heaven had come up with a strength, and loudness, and outrage, greater than from other parts of the earth. It was time for the righteous Governor to manifest himself.

As the first circumstance, three persons came as on a friendly visit to Abraham. Both at this point of the relation, and afterwards, it is impossible not to be struck with the calmness and quietness of the proceeding. There were no terrible portents—no magnificent phenomena—no thundering menaces—nor formidable preparations—nor effulgence of Divine Majesty. The patriarch's hospitality was accepted. The first thing unusual was a matter of complacent interest,—a renewed assurance of posterity to Abraham. But think what this friendly converse was the introduction to!

It was not for heavenly beings to stay long in direct intercourse with mortals—besides, there was something else to be done! "The men rose up from thence and looked toward Sodom," Genesis xviii. 16, that is, set out that way, Abraham accompanying them some distance from his tent. By this time it was signified to him, that there was an awful and immediate design against those cities; and this led to that memorable intercessory conversation in which the patriarch pleaded for Sodom. It was not solely on Lot's account, for he might have pleaded for *his* exemption.

We are left in the dark as to one circumstance. Only *two* of the persons went on to Sodom, leaving Abraham to converse with the Almighty. The *third* disappears from our view; unless he was a manifestation of the divine Being himself, and the same that Abraham conversed with in that solemn character. This is left entirely in uncertainty. But evidently it was with God himself that Abraham held the conversation. That conversation may suggest some points of instruction. For example; we ought not to be gratified with the sufferings and punishments of the wicked. There is sometimes a temptation to this; especially when the

wicked are seen in great pride, and wealth, and power —arrogating all things to themselves,—rioting in the spoils of their fellow mortals,—trampling with scorn on the weak or the just;—and at the same time diffusing moral corruption widely around. We are tempted to look forward with something like complacency to the awaiting vengeance. But this is not the spirit of Christ, nor the spirit of Abraham. The very best men will exceed all others in benevolent concern for the worst.

Abraham ventured an appeal to the divine equity. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right!" Observe, it is impossible to contemplate the divine attributes without forming some idea of what it is that is *right* for such a Being. We must necessarily form our conceptions of what is justice and goodness in the Supreme Being, upon the principles which he has declared to us, as the essence of those qualities in his creatures. So that our judgments of his proceedings will be in analogy to those we form of the actions of men. But in doing this, there is need of great caution and reverential humility, for the plain reason, that his proceedings have reference to an immense scale; they are to be "right" as in an infinitely extended and multiplied relation of things; in the midst of which our intellect can compass but an inexpressibly diminutive point. How limited, then, our power of judging of his justice in action! Then if we think of the divine *justice*, as an attribute to be appealed to *in behalf* of man, *that* is a formidable idea! Abraham did it, and was not rebuked; but how *many* times must any man, speaking to the Most High, appeal to his *mercy*, for *once* that he can appeal to his *justice!* In his praying for himself, the case is so; and if interceding for the community, the nation, how little dare he rest his plea on the numbers and virtues of good men!

Observe the divine indulgence to the narrow, weak apprehensions of good men. Abraham began his intercession as if he had been bespeaking the benevolence of only some exalted human being, with a kind

of pious artifice, namely, with a greater number when he knew he must descend to a less; and intending it as a device to smooth the way, and prevent a sudden, decided, indignant negative. God has to pardon in his servants a great deal of such feeling as attributes human qualities and dispositions to him.

For the sake of "fifty," or of "ten righteous," the Lord would have spared Sodom. What value then he must set on the few righteous in the earth! "For ten's sake;" *one* perhaps in *a thousand*, or possibly in several thousands. For *such* a proportion of holy fear, love, prayer, and practical purity, he would have spared Sodom. Such a ten would have been barely tolerated in the place—would have been scorned and wronged. Yet for their sake the wicked thousands would for a while longer have enjoyed the light of the sun, and the fertility of the plain. But even had there been the ten, what a melancholy spectacle! The mass and multitude not fit to live even on earth, and only ten fit to be transferred to heaven! What a distribution in the assignment to the infernal and to the celestial world! and how deplorable to find the populousness of the earth giving a calculation of the comparative solitude of heaven!

Abraham was come to the last permitted term in the gradation of his pleading. Perhaps he felt an intimation from the awful Being that he must stop here. But even if not, a good man will feel that he must not pray in total contravention to the divine justice. He dare not seek wholly to avert from exercise one grand attribute of the Governor of the world. "A God all mercy is a God unjust;" under such a Governor the human race would go to the very last possibility of wickedness. Abraham was to conclude here, and wait the event. We may observe what a perfect certainty he felt that there could not *be* ten, and the Judge *not discern* them every one.

"Abraham returned to his place," and it was now the afternoon. The people of Sodom little knew what a conversation they had been the subject of. The vain

and wicked little know, or think, or care, what fear the devout and righteous may be entertaining for them, or what intercessory supplications they may be making —and if they did know, many of them would but scorn such fears and prayers.

*One* righteous man dwelt in Sodom. We never think his conduct wise in going thither. It had one afflictive consequence, namely, that some branches of his family were involved in the destruction. Yet there was an overruling Providence in the case, There was to be in Sodom something that was to be saved in the hour of vengeance, to mark in a signal manner the contrast; to show how infallibly the righteous Governor distinguishes;—and what value he sets on the fidelity that will not conform to the surrounding wickedness. He would have there "a pearl of great price," to be selected out when the mighty mass should sink into a gulf.

Lot was sitting in the gate of the city, in the evening; on purpose, it is presumed, to receive any respectable stranger who would else be cast away among wicked barbarians. It is not improbable the evening was serene and beautiful. We can imagine the setting sun, for the last time, throwing a mild and softened radiance on the cities and across the plain; and numbers of the people gayly sporting in so gentle a light and air; and no warning by ominous signs and elemental disorder. Nature keeps the secret of her great Governor. If *conscience* will not alarm the sinners, nothing else shall. But what was there *latent* in that soft tranquillity? There was there the hovering power of divine justice—the spirit of retribution, just growing to the intensity to reveal itself in resistless flame.

Two strangers arrived at the gate, carelessly regarded, except by Lot, who "entertained angels unawares." There was no indication who they were, or why they came: there was nothing in their appearance to intimidate,—nothing to repress a profligate insolence. Some of the people saw them, but knew not

what they saw. No mysterious and apprehensive sentiment was infused by their coming. All was as usual in Sodom, and even Lot knew of nothing that was to follow.

But the commencement of the tragedy was at hand. The first movement was the tumult before Lot's house; —the assault actuated by the vilest wickedness. When nations or individuals are ready for ruin, they generally are prompt to provoke it,—to do that one thing more, which is all that remains wanting. When the train comes to the point, that there is but *one more*, they are ready for *that* also. The last sin of a wicked career seems to have in it a peculiar awfulness. The dreadful effect of all the preceding seemed suspended; it even seemed as if that effect might be averted if the completing sin were not added; if the sinner could have stopped short of *that!* The former sins seemed, as it were, to wait, to throw all their deadly efficacy into the last, to be there converged in destruction. The concluding sin comes immediately to the dread consequence; it is the one that breaks through into eternity, with all the past sins rushing after it! It belongs to hardened sin, not to be aware of its own atrocity and danger. These men of Sodom, on the last evening of their lives, challenged the angels of the Lord to battle! "Unawares" they assaulted mighty celestial spirits; as "unawares" Lot had entertained them. It is but a just judgment on persisting, hardened iniquity, that it should be permitted at last to do things of which it is not apprised of the aggravation and the peril.

Lot went out to appease the vicious and furious assailants with an offer which he had no right to make, to expose to them his daughters; it showed indeed how sacred he held the rites of hospitality; but all duties are consistent and compatible. Rather than do one great evil to prevent another, a good man must commit the event to all-powerful Providence. But the matter was to be decided after another manner. "The two men" drew Lot safe into the house, and smote the

people with blindness. Lot would be exceedingly surprised at this; perhaps now for the first time he began to perceive they were something more than they appeared. Whether it was a total blindness we cannot know; more likely perhaps a bewildered baffling affection of their sight. However, it did not repress the courage and fierceness of wickedness. "Small and great" persisted in aiming at the door. If "small" mean *youth*, it may warrant us to observe, that *wicked* education very rarely fails to be successful.

The house and family were quite secure; but the two visitants were not come to take or give repose. They declared their commission and purpose; and that one thing only was first to be done; Lot must go to his sons-in-law and their families, and warn them instantly to quit the city. He did so in vain! No wonder the sons-in-law should despise his warning; but their wives, his daughters, were of the same mind. They by this time probably had lost his God; and therefore he must lose them. It would be with a sad adieu that he left the house of each. He returned to receive the peremptory command to take his own family and instantly be gone. The angels had calmly waited while he had gone to do his part; now they were to do theirs. The morning was beginning to appear.

"He lingered;" whether from some degree of unbelief, or from being confused and stupified with amazement and horror. But there was calmness and decision there, though he had none. The angels laid hold on the hands of Lot and his family, "the Lord being merciful unto him." Such a situation displays the contrast between the "immortals" and the feeble spirits clothed in flesh;—on the part of the former the serenity,—the entireness of determination,—the fulness of might and will for the most tremendous agency,—and yet the indulgent kindness. The angels led them out of the devoted city. "Escape for thy life; look not behind thee; flee to the mountain, neither tarry thou in all the plain." All this might well be named *visible providence*. It was the protection of the Almighty,

and the guardian cares of his angels displayed in exercise,—in the visible personal agency of these powerful spirits. But though there be *now* no such *palpable* manifestations, how often may there be in a good man's life, interpositions as critical, and cares no less patient and kind, if the agency were made visible in any one of many conjunctures. Then for his soul there is a series of agency of a still far nobler kind! A greater Spirit is employed there!

Lot was departing; and it is strange he should not have been willing to remove as far as possible from such a scene as this devoted place was going to be. But he ventured to entreat he might make his asylum in Zoar, implying in the petition that it might for that purpose be spared. This does look like weakness actually becoming presumption, but the wonderfully indulgent reply was, "See, I have accepted thee in this thing also;" and with the addition, "I cannot do any thing till thou be come thither." But the command to hasten forward is finally repeated with a most peremptory urgency. It was but for his sake, it had been signified, that the catastrophe was delayed; and not for *his* sake would it be delayed long. The divine vengeance was suspended a little while for the piety and the necessity of a favoured mortal; but it was not to be suspended for his trifling or unbelief. The last moments of Sodom were measuring out by the steps of the fugitives across the plain. During these moments and this flight, the thoughts of Lot would work in unspeakable amazement. Only a few short hours before, he was sitting at the gate and two men approached, who were invited into his house;—an outrage was committed, and then they were angels! A few minutes more, and he was commanded away, with the declaration of a direful immediate doom impending over all the region. The last impression of their visages, their hands, and their voices, was still on his senses;—and he was now impelled on by the dreadful apprehension of hearing or seeing some tremendous sign of commencing destruction.

It is quite possible, that in such amazement of spirit he might not even be sensible of the fate of his wife, till he found her wanting at the entrance of Zoar; especially as *he* did *not* look back, and she was in the disposition rather to fall behind his steps than to advance before or beside him. For we cannot doubt, that it was her mind that looked back, as well as her eyes. Though very possibly, the mere literal disobedience to the injunction would have been fatal. But to lose her so, perhaps much more than midway to the place of refuge, was most mournful. What an admonition to the relatives of a pious person, to go the whole way with him to the eternal refuge!

The reduced family entered Zoar and the sun had risen on the earth. But the *two men* who had come to Sodom were left there to await this destined moment; to witness, in inaction and contemplation, how a wicked multitude began a day of which they were not to see the evening. But could nothing beguile or tempt them away, before the moment for action should arrive? And will nothing be done to send them away? One word from their great Master, and they would have fled like the shades of the night! And shall not one word be sent up to him to implore it? Not one word for this, after the cry of their wickedness had so long ascended to heaven? He "repented" over Nineveh when it listened to the warning voice. But here all was over!—and "the Lord rained fire and brimstone," and "an horrible tempest!"

What was the precise manner of this fearful catastrophe is beyond our conjecture. From the consequence, as remaining to this hour, it would seem that an earthquake either accompanied or followed; but "the fire from heaven" is decidedly indicated as the grand chief agent of the destruction. What descent of fire, however, and how such an effect on the earth, none can tell. But we repel that philosophizing spirit, as it would be called, which insists on resolving all the extraordinary phenomena, recorded in the Old Testament, into the effect of *merely* natural causes. Noth-

ing can be more contemptible than such presumption of philosophy; just as if the *order of nature* had been constituted by some other and greater Being, and *intrusted* to the Almighty to be administered, under an obligation, never to suspend for a moment, the fixed laws! Just as if it could not consist with infinite Wisdom to order a system so that in particular cases a greater advantage should arise from a momentary deviation than from an invariable procedure!

The people of Sodom had no time for speculations;—there was but just time for terror, and conscience, and despair! The images of that hour of destruction we leave to contemplative thought,—and only add; that our Lord says, there is a still greater guilt, and a more awful destruction, even than theirs! They will see greater criminals than themselves at the last day; and from lands where the fire of heaven did *not* fall! The man that lives and dies rejecting HIM had better have been exposed to the rain of fire and brimstone, and gone down in the horrid gulf of the Vale of Siddim!

## XXIII.

### ELIJAH'S SACRIFICE, AND THE PRIESTS OF BAAL.

THE sacred history, 1 Kings xviii., so wonderful itself, is surrounded by wonders, in the preceding and following portions; something like a volcanic tract, where the marks of a stupendous agency remain conspicuous on every side. The preceding chapter relates the prophet's denunciation to Ahab, "There shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." The expression is indeterminate, as to the length of time. It imparts *thus* much; "there will be

no rain till I shall say that there will,—and that will not be for several years." It was, in the event, three years and a half. The apostle James says that "Elijah prayed earnestly that it might not rain," on the principle that the severest chastisement is better than unchecked progressive wickedness and utter ruin. He was then commanded to disappear; and retired into the profoundest solitude, except that the ravens found him out, and were made to act like ministering spirits to him. *They* brought him food; his countrymen would have administered poison. How *they* were supplied with what they brought to *him*, it is in vain to conjecture. Possibly by depredation on the stores of some wealthy idolater; if they were sent to levy such a contribution, it would be in vain to attempt to prevent them.

He must have stayed a good while in this solitary retreat,—for it was "till the brook dried up." It is evident that by the time he went to the widow of Zarephath, the land was in a calamitous condition, for she had resigned all hope of any further means of life.—The miracle of the meal and oil, and the restoration of the widow's son.—It would seem that he remained at Zarephath till the end of the three years and six months; he abode "in a loft," we are told, 1 Kings xvii. 19, a most humble apartment! There were spacious, and sumptuous, and magnificent abodes in the land, but *hither* was sent to dwell—the person that was to go off from the earth in "a chariot of fire"—and here doubtless he received visits which well comported with such a destiny. Our imagination can easily represent the nature of his thoughts and exercises, but cannot rise to their devotional exaltation and solemnity. The utmost efforts to find him out were made by the king of Israel. Was it in pure hatred and revenge,—and in order to destroy him? Much more probably it was as believing that in some way or other, the continuance or removal of the dreadful calamity materially depended on Elijah. Ahab regarded him as having pronounced a sentence which no one else could set aside;

as a being who had absconded with the great key of the storehouse of nature. But what should Ahab have thought of all his prophets, when *they* could give him no assistance toward discovering Elijah? while neither could they bring down one shower,—one drop, of rain!

The state of the land and its inhabitants was by this time extremely dreadful. What a picture might have been exhibited, if the sacred historian, like other historians, had been disposed to amplify for the purpose of a striking effect! Great numbers must have perished; the rest were in a deplorable state. It is doubtful whether much assistance could be obtained from the neighbouring regions; for the country of Tyre and Sidon was equally afflicted, for Zarephath was there. The cattle were nearly all destroyed,—as appears from Ahab's orders to Obadiah. The king himself went out, to survey a part of his desolate, miserable realm, and dying population. At every step he saw the effects of his abominable idolatries. It was, in truth, one vast sacrifice which he had made, and was making, to Moloch; a nation of human victims offered with all the brute tribes in addition. For since they perished expressly on account of the false gods, they might justly and strictly be accounted as sacrifices; and himself was the royal high-priest. But no indication appears of repentance or remorse.

Obadiah would behold the scene with very different emotions. He "feared the Lord greatly;" had rescued one hundred of the prophets, probably *pupils* of the prophets, from Jezebel's massacre. No doubt, it was just for the purpose of such beneficent services to the faithful, that a man like this was preserved, by a very special providence, safe in such a station. We may be sure he was proved to be of high worth and integrity in his office; but he had what would be accounted the most odious of all qualities in that court—*fidelity to God.*

This man was suddenly encountered by the very last person he could expect to see. Elijah had been

commanded away from his obscure retreat. And he was coming again into action in a manner that was worth having remained in devout contemplation so long. Obadiah's plea to excuse himself is overruled. But why was not the prophet's course directed to meet the king himself, in the first instance? No doubt it was that the monarch might be compelled to go to meet *him*, as an homage to the prophetic character, and the divine authority. They met;—knew each other well.—Ahab attempted a display of spirit by beginning with a reproachful salutation; but *this* was not the time. Elijah's aspect and manner overbore him. The reproach was returned, not in the way of altercation,—but of dignified authority, and with a truth that smote on conscience; followed by a command to the king, to call together his subjects and his prophets. It does not appear that he even explained for what purpose. He was not sent to talk to one man alone, even though a king.

As to the prophet's deportment in this interview, —his solemn direct commission from the Almighty placed him on a ground above the minor relations of governor and subject. In ordinary circumstances, he would have been sensible of whatever respect was due to the ruler of the people, if any respect *was* due to a man who exercised that very office for the most wicked and pernicious purposes; who promoted, and shared, and surpassed, the depravity and impiety of his people. But here the prophet had a high independent capacity to maintain; he was commissioned to speak and act in character of judge and dictator—and we may believe, was far above the meanness of any miserable pride in doing so. That which he was invested with, in the special capacity of a prophet, was in no sense his own. It was not a talent, nor a merit. It was an *official capacity*, of which the dignity, or virtue, belonged most simply and entirely to him that conferred it. It was something extraneous to the man himself; might be conferred, or taken away, in a moment, and at any moment. Of all this,

the prophets appear to have been kept perfectly sensible; accordingly, it was not personal *arrogance*, when they assumed a commanding manner and language.

Ahab felt it to be something more than a mere command of *Elijah* that he should assemble the people at Mount Carmel. Therefore he instantly complied, though doubtless not without internal mortification and refractory feeling. "*All* Israel," it is said, meaning of course a good proportion of them from all parts, so as to represent the whole. But literally *all* the avowed priests of idolatry, eight hundred and fifty. Their patroness, the queen, would concur in ordering them thither. It was coming to a question whether *she* should maintain her dominion, with respect to religion, in the kingdom. The whole assembling multitude, as soon as Elijah was heard of, may be supposed to have surmised that it was to be some grand question concerning *religion*—and it would be a matter of most lively interest to all,—*if* they believed that the dreadful visitation of the famine was implicated with it.

Could the *idolatrous* part of the multitude expect rain, and bread, from gods that for so long a time could not, or would not, give them any? There is indeed no indication that they had at all repented of their idolatry, but this experience would surely make them less attached to it. The seven thousand faithful would hope that something would be done to shake the horrid and cruel domination of false religion. This might be the wish also of numbers who had through fear yielded to practise its rites—with inward shame and self-reproach. But think of the eight hundred and fifty priests of idolatry, conspicuously prominent on the appointed ground, in the garbs, and with the ensigns of their deities, bearing evidence of being *well fed* "at Jezebel's table!" Many of them might be real devotees, with heart and soul; some, mere professional officiators, not much thinking or caring about the religion itself. Some might be, as in the Romish church, little better than *atheists*, con-

scious deceivers of the people, but delighting in both the domination and the emolument. On the whole, there might be great confidence among them that they could not have much to apprehend from a rencounter with the single, proscribed prophet Elijah. Presumption is a characteristic attendant on false religion, and on a falsification of the true, for it inspires a high self-valuation. But these men really had a great deal to sustain their presumption.

The *trial* however was now at hand. "How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, follow him." "And the people answered him not a word." Was this silence right, on the part of the faithful adherents? We think *not;* for Elijah's address was plainly an appeal to their present convictions,—antecedently to any proof which he might be about to give. Where was Obadiah in this juncture? Did they think it would be an ill-timed ostentation, an irreverent disturbance of the solemnity of the scene?—They would plead so afterwards, no doubt; would say, "they had been quite certain of the result of the prophet's proceedings,—and therefore it would have been but an affectation of zeal and courage to have declared themselves previously." All expressed approbation of the grand test which he proposed. The proposal was too sudden, and too immediately to be executed, to allow those wicked men any time for artful contrivance; else certainly it would have been attempted, though in that case frustrated.

It was proper that the idolaters should make the experiment first, and most ample time was given them. Some delay of their success might even have been of service to their cause. Contemplate this immense legion of priests calling on Baal, before the waiting, gazing multitude!—Behold a sample of that human reason which has *itself* been idolized,—solemnly, perseveringly, furiously, invoking—a nonentity —a vain creation of fancy—and fashioned by that fancy in the most hateful character! Baal and Baalim are very indefinite denominations, being given to a

great diversity of pagan deities. It is supposed that the chief Baal of Palestine was nearly the same as the Jupiter of the Greeks and Romans; but with a confused participation of the attributes of divers divinities. In the instance before us he seems to have been worshipped without an image. This assemblage of priests most likely adored a variety of gods in this one comprehensive service. The priests of "the groves" united, though named as a distinct class. "They called, from morning till noon;" but no answer; no sign; no flash of electric fire; no demon's invisible torch permitted! For though there was no Baal there, to hear the conjuration, we can easily imagine there were hovering there unseen, agents who would soon have lighted the flame, if not restrained by superior power. Such aid would not have been wanting as that which was permitted for a while to the magicians of Egypt. But *this* time, those agents were to look on, and forbear! The people also looked on,—with intense interest! There were Israelites waiting to see *who* was their God! Some of those beguiled sinners would wonder at Baal's delay. Some would feel doubt coming on their minds, and some would begin to feel scorn. Elijah too long looked on; he could give them time. He knew he should want little himself. Let all their gods be invoked, by all their names and titles! Let all their incantations be expended! Let their last tribute of idolatrous zeal be fully paid! Let the deluded miserable populace see how tenacious their spiritual tyrants were of their enslaved souls!

It was in silence that the prophet had thus long looked on. When he *did* speak, what would you have him to have said? a gentle dissuasion?—*that* would have been no fit language to the insulters of the Almighty,—and the destroyers of the people! a loud denunciation of vengeance?—*that* was to be executed, and needed not be spoken. "It came to pass that Elijah mocked." We are not to imagine this as said in a light, bantering tone of pleasantry;

as if the prophet would *amuse* himself with their unsuccessful impiety; but as an austere and bitter rebuke in the form of sarcasm, and it had in it a propriety and truth, without which sarcasm and ridicule have no point. Some such thing as he in mockery suggests, was to be supposed by them to account for their failure. "He is a god," "as you assume,—and favourable to you. There must therefore be some occasional cause of this his inattention. Is he not talking, pursuing, in a journey, or asleep?" Now this was quite pertinent, because the heathens did suppose such things might happen, to prevent the gods hearing them. Le Clerc illustrates from Homer—Jupiter had a bed, and sometimes went to sleep—Thetis could not obtain a desired boon from Jupiter, because he was gone on a journey to Ethiopia, and was not to return for twelve days. Baal's worshippers were not less gross in their notions; and therefore such things were *justly* thrown in their teeth. Will any one say this was too harsh, and almost cruel, when Elijah saw the wretched men thus labouring in vain? What! in the land of Israel?—among a people perishing under the effects of the abominations which these men had promoted among them? What! after these wicked men had doubtless abetted Jezebel in killing all the teachers of the true religion that could be found?

After hours of vain invocation, they had recourse to their most wild and barbarous rites; leapt upon the altar—cut themselves. Now, this was no newly invented expedient of theirs, prompted by despair. These were customary rites in the worship of several heathen deities. It was like a judicial doom, that those who would worship false gods, should do it at the cost of plaguing and torturing themselves. Miserably exhausted many of these priests must have become, but the *will* was resolute, inflexible, and invincible; they went on till near the time of the Jewish "evening sacrifice." Still no voice,—no auspicious sign,—no fire. The great assembly that witnessed this long process, had to make their reflections. The

great majority had to reflect that *these* were the personages to whom they had long surrendered their judgments, their consciences, and the religion of the God of Israel; that these had been their accepted intercessors with invisible power. They had to consider in what degree themselves might be involved in the consequences which now would seem to impend. It was too much to hope that justice would entirely dissever the retribution.

Elijah knew his appointed moment. Think what a mighty tide of feeling would rush toward him when he summoned the people to a new ground, and a different altar! A ruined altar which he had to rebuild; it was left undone till then,—that there might be no air of previous assumption, "I will wait to see whether an altar will be wanted;" nor of careful preparation; the stones had remained out of their place, that every one of them might be laid under the inspection of so many observers. Then the water was poured three times. See how rigorously the Governor of the world would authenticate a miraculous interposition. This "water" would be a most formidable circumstance in the view of the idolatrous priests. It was truly a strange preparation for a burnt sacrifice in the presence of those to whom not one spark had been afforded by heaven, or earth, or hell; when the active spirit of that element seemed as profoundly asleep as Baal himself. No sign of it—no blue sulphureous element had begun to appear round this new altar—no meteors to hiss and glare. But there was to be a fire, under which the water, and the very stones, were in a moment to vanish! An emblem,—may we not consider it?—or rather a precursory sparkle, and beam, and specimen, of *that* fire to which, one day, the globe shall be a sacrifice, in contempt of all its oceans! But *that* fire will leave no more controversies to be decided between God and false divinities. *That* will be a ufneral flame, as to the dominion of the powers of evil, in this world; but it will not be lighted till all is ready for the sacrifice, as Elijah's fire was not. Nothing is more solemn than a short delay in an aw-

ful crisis! It did not come till he had distinctly invoked *him*, to whose sole divinity it was to testify. The whole assembly were clearly to understand what being it was on whom he called for the demonstrative sign, which had irradiated the cloud before the camp of Israel. The fire was to second that which had flamed on Sinai, and which had descended on Sodom. It was to be a fire of intelligence, as well as power. It was to be Elijah's prayer converted and returned in flame. The prophet's prayer was, that the very TRUTH might lighten on the scene,—and consume all question, doubt, and subterfuge. The Invisible Presence was there; the thunderbolt was ready; and as soon as he had ended, "it fell." Neither sacrifice, nor altar, nor water, remained! The whole materials of the testimony were consumed; as the book of divine revelation will perish in the last fire that fulfils its predictions.

The effect was irresistible on the multitude. "When all the people saw it they fell on their faces: and they said, The Lord, he is the God; the Lord, he is the God." As to the priests of idolatry, it was in literal obedience to the divine law, given to the Israelites, that they were all put to death. Deuteronomy xiii. 5. The heap that was probably raised over their dead bodies, ought to have been to the people a monument, as conspicuous to thought as Carmel was to their view.

The whole transaction should be conspicuous and monumental. We think—how powerful and how holy a being then was manifested. Let us not forget to consider, that it was the same being in whose presence *we* are every moment; and under whose government we shall be for ever. Let us reflect how *all* idolatry, that of which *we* may be guilty, is to be dreaded in such a presence—and let us think how the adoration is to be performed,—and how the mercy is to be propitiated, of a God whose justice is a "consuming fire."

## XXIV.

### IGNORANCE OF OUR FUTURE MODE OF EXISTENCE.

"*It doth not yet appear what we shall be.*"—It is the familiar experience of our thinking, that the mind is often led into questions, the pursuit of something not clearly known, and desired to be known. Many of these questions are such as, being pursued, soon lead the thinking spirit to the brink, as it were, of a vast unfathomable gulf. It is arrested, and becomes powerless at the limit; there it stands, looking on a dark immensity; the little light of intellect and knowledge which it brings or kindles, can dart no ray into the mysterious obscurity. Sometimes there seems to be seen, at some unmeasured distance, a glimmering spot of light, but it makes nothing around it visible, and itself vanishes.

But often it is one unbounded, unvaried, starless, midnight darkness,—without one luminous point through infinite space. To this obscurity we are brought in pursuing any one of very many questions of mere speculation and curiosity. But there is one question which combines with the interest of speculation and curiosity an interest incomparably greater, nearer, more affecting, more solemn. It is the simple question —"WHAT SHALL WE BE?" How soon it is spoken!—but who shall reply? Think, how profoundly this question, this mystery, concerns us,—and in comparison with this, what are to us all questions of all sciences? What to us all researches into the constitution and laws of material nature? What—all investigations into the history of past ages? What to us —the future career of events in the progress of states and empires? What to us—what shall become of this globe itself, or all the mundane system? What WE shall be, *we ourselves*, is the matter of surpassing and infinite interest!

There is in the contemplation a magnitude, a solemnity, which transcends and overwhelms our utmost

faculty of thought. To think that we, who are here, and are thus in possession of an existence which is but as of yesterday,—shall continue to be in some mode, and in some scene, of existence, for millions of ages, and that *that* will still be as nothing, in comparison with what is still to follow! that a duration passing away beyond all reach of the stupendous power of numbers, will still be as nothing! That it will still be we ourselves, the very same beings. That it will be a perfectly specific manner of being—with a full consciousness of what it is—an internal world of thought and emotion—a perfect sense of relations to the system in which we shall find ourselves placed; —and this a continual succession of distinct sentiments and experiences, and with the constant certainty of the train going on for ever!

Reflect again, that it is we, ourselves, of whom we are saying this. How overpowered are we in the attempt to realize, to thought, what nevertheless will be so!—"I, that am now, that am here, that am thus;—what shall I be, and where, and how, when this vast system of nature shall have passed away?" What,—after ages more than there are leaves, or blades of grass, on the whole surface of this globe, or atoms in its enormous mass, shall have expired? What—after another such stupendous lapse of duration shall be gone? Those terms, of amazing remoteness, will arrive; yes, those periods, the very thought of which engulfs our faculties, will *be come*, will *be past!*

Through every step and advance, in the incalculable succession, on through those periods, the fact of what we then ARE, will be in mighty evidence pressing on all our perceptions, and then still onward, infinitely, eternally beyond; and will be definable, in certain terms of a language in which we shall then form or express our conceptions. "I am"—but what will follow? —what will the description be? what constitution, what manner of existence? what faculties? how exerted? what feelings? what employments? what relations? what communications? what place? There will be the fact, the actual reality, answering to all these ques-

tions. But what it will be, there is but One Intelligence that perfectly knows. But here, even in our own breasts, are the intelligences that will know, and know in their own experience—the incomparably most interesting manner of knowing.

Is not this, beyond all others, the subject for deep and solemn musing—for intense inquisitiveness—for awful wonder?

Think again, of what diminutive concern, in comparison, are many of those ambitious inquiries to reach the Unknown, which have been the most intense excitement to investigating minds. To ascertain, for instance, the yet unknown course of a great river, has excited the invincible ardour of some of the most enterprising of mortals—who, in long succession, have dared all perils, and sacrificed their lives. To force a passage among unknown seas and coasts, in the most frowning and dreadful regions and climates; to penetrate to the discovery of the hidden laws, and powers, and relations of nature; to ascertain the laws, the courses, the magnitudes, the distances, of the heavenly bodies;—something—is the truth, in all these subjects of ambitious and intent inquisition. But what if all this could be known?—If we could have the entire structure of this globe disclosed, to its very centre, to our sight or intelligence;—if, through some miraculous intervention of divine power, we could have a vision of the whole economy of one of the remotest stars;—or if our intelligence could pass down, under a prophetic illumination, to the end of time in this world, beholding, in continued series, the grand course of the world's affairs and events;—what would any or all of these things be, in comparison with the mighty prospect of our own eternal existence?—with what is to be revealed upon us, and to be realized in our very being, and experience, through everlasting duration?

When we think of such a comparison we may justly indulge some regret and wonder, that very many inquisitive minds,—perhaps the far greater number of such,—should feel an immeasurably greater degree

of curiosity, interest, and even solicitude, in directing their thoughts to the unknown and the future of the inferior subjects of conjecture and anticipation, than to this superlatively important unknown. Not that we would wish to throw any disparagement on the conjectural inquisitive excursions of mind on any subject of inquiry. But surely it is a proof of strange perversion in the soul of man, that these eager excursions to penetrate into the remote and obscure, should go on every track rather than on the grand line of its own future existence!

It would not be an adequate nor an honest plea, to allege that the knowledge is beyond our reach. In any matter where we feel a profound prospective interest, the thoughts, the imagination, will go that way, by an irresistible attraction. When certain that there is to be something great, and immensely important to ourselves—the spirit goes forth towards it, earnestly tries to look into the distance—eagerly seizes all glimpses, intimations, prognostics—revolves the probabilities, the possibilities—exerts its utmost power of reason, conjecture, invention—to form to itself an image of what the fact may be. How prodigiously, how monstrously strange it were, that there should not be the very utmost of this ardent excitement in the anticipation of what we shall be hereafter and for ever. This earnest tendency to look forward is natural and rational, notwithstanding that such darkness rests over the immense interminable scene of our future existence.

But still, the question will arise, Why is it so overshadowed with darkness,—since it concerns us so deeply,—since it is ours? There is something that is ours, which is to be a thousand years hence, a million of years hence, a million of ages hence, a million times that,—and so forward; it *is* ours, for it is certain *to be*, and certain to be *inseparable from us*. It is to be even ourselves, as absolutely ours as the state we are to be in to-morrow is so;—nay, as much as the state we are in this moment belongs to us. But then, the case being so,—why are we so precluded from a

foresight which would in some measure enable us to realize, to our apprehension, that future state of ourselves?—One obvious thing in answer is, the essential impossibility. Reflect, how very imperfectly we comprehend even our present existence,—after all manner of experience of it, and intimacy with it. Diminutive as we are, we involve a world of mystery. The acutest, the profoundest investigators have been baffled. What is life? What is soul? What is even body? How combined?—and if we had the means of pursuing the inquiry into our future state, it may be presumed that every mystery would be aggravated upon us. It is true, that the great "Revealer of secrets" could have told us, by revelation, some things respecting the future state which we might, in some superficial general manner, have understood. For example;—whether the disembodied spirit will have a material vehicle? Whether there will be a distinct formal process of judgment on it at death? In what place it shall dwell till the resurrection? Whether it will, during that interval, be apprized of the transactions on this earth? Whether it will have sensible, intimate communications with superior spirits? Whether it will have a clearer, vaster manifestation of the grand scene of the creation? Whether it will have a luminous foresight of what it will become at the resurrection? When, and of what kind, will be the local habitations thereafter? What the employments will chiefly consist of?

All this, however, would have reached but a little way into the eternal progression!—even if so far it gave us light. But what we would insist on is, that all disclosures given of the future state would have been, to us, faint and inefficient information. For if it had been given in terms merely general, it would have left our conceptions in a state nearly as vague and unsatisfactory as ever, no definite substance; and, in particular and specific terms it could not have been given, without becoming either unintelligible or degraded; for it must have been given either in terms

of very close analogy with our present state,—or in terms, if any such could have been found, fitted and true to the nature of a vastly different economy. Suppose the former; that is, terms and images belonging to our present state,—then the descriptive information would have been degraded. For then, the whole vision that should have been so grand, would have been brought down *towards* the level, though not quite *to* it, of our present notions and state,—our modes of life, —of habitation, of narrow limited activity, of imperfect social communication. There would be a servile analogy or resemblance to our manner of relation to place, to surrounding elements, to the modes and sources of pleasure—and to our means and instruments of knowledge and power. In short, the whole revealed description must have been conformed to the apprehensions of beings living in these gross bodies, and having all their ideas modified by their bodily senses. But this would be to humiliate, to degrade the description and theory of a superior state; and not only would the description be degraded,—but it would not be true. On such accounts, a thinking and aspiring mind feels little satisfaction or complacency in any of those imaginary particular representations of what the economy of a superior world may be supposed to be. There is a recoiling feeling,—"that is far too like things as they might be here—that is making only a superior terrestrial state."

We supposed, on the other hand, the revealed specific description of a future state to be given in terms truly appropriate to a quite different and higher economy, —and then it would have been unintelligible. But in truth the supposition itself is unintelligible and absurd. That would be the language of another world. No terms could convey to us a totally different order of ideas; no human language could do it,—and any other would be but the mysterious emblems of eternity—bright, indeed, on yonder side, toward heaven, but dark on this, toward us. Such a revelation would be a sun in total and perpetual eclipse.

We say, then, that it does not "yet appear what we shall be," plainly because it is impossible.

If we went no further in the inquiry than merely the state immediately after death, the separate state,—we can instantly conceive, that when the soul is taken out of this body with all its senses, and therefore out of the whole system of relations with the senses, and all the modes of perception belonging to the senses, it must be in a state of which no specific ideas can be conveyed to us.

Even supposing, contrary to all this, that some specific conceptions of the future state could be and were conveyed to us, the effect would not be what we are ready to imagine. We are apt to fancy how mightily and permanently striking and commanding such ideas would be. But no—they would become gradually familiarized among our ideas, and lose their extraordinary and, so to speak, extra-mundane quality and power of impression. They must be mingled with our ordinary conceptions, be adverted to in our ordinary language, and would soon cease to be like messengers sent to us from the dead and the world of spirits.

A far stronger impression is made on *thinking* spirits, and on others *nothing* makes an impression, by an undefined magnificence, by a grand and awful mystery,—when we are absolutely certain that there is a stupendous reality veiled in that mystery; when quite certain too, that it relates to ourselves—and that it will at length be disclosed.

Such a grand reality, thus mysteriously veiled, attracts thinking spirits most mightily—like the mystic and awful recess in the inmost part of the temple. It keeps in action the inquisitiveness, conjectures, expectation. It sets the mind on imagining the utmost that it can of grandeur and importance; and the idea still is, after the utmost efforts, "It is far greater than even *all that!*"

Thus, if we will think, this grandeur veiled in darkness has a more powerful effect on the mind, than any distinct particulars made palpable to our apprehension

—and brought down to our level in order to be made so. So far then it is better that it should not "yet appear what we shall be."

In this life men are placed in this world's relations, a system of relations corresponding to our inhabiting a gross, frail, mortal body, with all its wants and circumstances—and that we have to perform all the various business of this world. That there are innumerable thoughts, cares, employments, belonging inseparably to this our state; and that therefore there must not be such a manifestation of the future state as would confound, stop, and break up, this system. It is true, that what we have been saying, nearly amounts to this—that no revelation in words, such as we could clearly understand, would so take hold on our minds as to produce any such effect. To produce such an effect, there must then be mighty and portentous circumstances and appearances, extraordinary interferences, things to astonish and shake the constitution of our nature; or else, perfectly extraordinary impressions forced on our minds to give us intimations and specimens of another state of existence, and produce overpowering emotions concerning it. This could be, if God so willed—but this must not be, because it would unfit men for the regular performance of the business of this life.

We add that other plain reason for our being kept in such ignorance of the exact nature of the future state; that faith is to be the grand principle of our feelings and conduct respecting hereafter. We are to believe, to be persuaded, and to act conformably to that persuasion,—the whole present system must be consonant with this. This appointment of faith to be the actuating principle, is partly, as we see, because it cannot be otherwise; and partly because, to be governed by the declaration and will of God, is the vital essence of all the obligations of his creatures.

But now, will it not be said, that the latter part of these representations does in effect contradict the former; that we first make it a reproach to men that they so little direct their thoughts and imagination to

a future state,—and that next we acquit them, by showing the impossibility of forming any clear conceptions of it, if they did so direct their minds? What is the use, it may be said, of indulging our musings and inquisitive conjectures on the unknown? We answer, it is necessary, when there is such a stupendous reality for certain before us, it is evidently a primary duty to think of it, and with deepest interest:—and we cannot think of it as one simple, single, invariable idea. The mind must go, or attempt to go, in some degree, into special modes of conception respecting it.

It is an elevating and spiritualizing exercise of the mind. It tends to carry the soul a little way toward its proper region, and to lessen the false importance of the things of this world, and to slacken their hold. It contributes to obviate that unnatural and pernicious estrangement and dissociation between our present and future state. It tends to habituate the spirit to seek and find the grand importance of its existence in its hereafter, and to awake a lively and a sacred curiosity—which is surely a right and a worthy state of feeling with which to go toward another world, and to go into it. It may help to turn to valuable account the varieties in the present system of our existence—the facts in surrounding nature—the immediate circumstances of our own being, by,—prompting, on each particular, the thought and the question, "What corresponding to this,—what in contrariety to this,—what instead of this, may there be in that other world?" It may aid to keep us associated with those who are gone thither, It may give new emphasis to our impression of the evil of sin, and the excellence of all wisdom, holiness, and piety, by the thought, "What manner of effect is this—or this—adapted to result in, in that future state?"

By this exercise of contemplative anticipation, we may make excellent use of those figures and emblems in which revelation has shadowed out the future state, carrying the thoughts as far as we can from the mere figure, to what would in a higher sense best correspond to it. In such an exercise, the particular charac-

ter of the individual's mind, his taste, his less or greater abstraction in thinking, will, and very properly may have a leading influence. Many pious minds may love to imagine something very considerably in analogy with the present order of existence,—only greatly raised and refined, but never losing sight of the parallel; and this will no doubt greatly contribute to a distinctness of ideas; an analogous order of senses—and as adapted to them, beautiful and sublime scenes—enchanting music of sounds, &c.

With others the wish will be to go as far away from resemblance as is possible without going into absolute and impalpable abstraction, into an unrealizable vacuity,—and this we think is strongly warranted by what is said of the nature of the body which shall be constituted at the resurrection, and by the consideration of its immortality. Something widely, immensely different from all that belongs to it now, is surely implied by the assertion that it is to be like "the glorious body" of the Mediator. What can we imagine of that body? Very far, surely, from any close analogy with this earthly structure. Consider it too, as capable of rising to "meet the Lord in the air." Consider that pointed contrast, rather than any parallel, which the apostle exhibits in his account of it, a body raised in "glory," in "power," in "incorruption,"—and to crown all, a "spiritual" body. He displays this body in lofty triumph over the present body. The description gives the full impression of something not only immensely different, but specifically and essentially different.—Then consider the strange, the mysterious circumstance of its immortality. A bodily structure immortal!—adapted to live for ever and ever. Here we are carried away out of all conceivable analogy, as by the whirlwind that took Elijah away.

In this its immortality, we are not to suppose the operation of a perpetual miracle,—but that it will be naturally immortal, by the same essential law as the soul is so; that it will not have, either in its material consistence or its vital organization, any inherent principle of decay. But how confounded is all intellect or

created and fixed within the feeling itself;—simply a fancy, in the attempt to conceive of such a body,—or of its senses, parts, or vital action! If we attempt to imagine a material scenery, and order of elements, corresponding in quality to such a body, how lost are we again! Yet such a representation calls upon us, not to forbear thinking on the mysterious subject,—but to aim at thinking sublimely.

After all, and amid all our efforts to conceive of the mode of the future existence, it will be well to occupy our contemplations much upon the grand general elements of the future felicity: holiness—charity—wisdom—power—immortality—enjoyment of the divine presence and benignity.

Let no curiosity of high speculation beguile us for a moment out of recollection of the one mighty difference,—of the two grand opposites,—in the future state, the condition of the redeemed and purified, and the unbelieving and unrighteous!

---

## XXV.

### CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE OF THE PERFECTIBILITY OF MAN.

"*When that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.*"—One of the general ideas naturally arising at the repetition of such words would be, that FUTURITY is *the greatness of man*, and that *hereafter* is the grand scene for the attainment of the fulness of his existence. When depressed and mortified by a conscious littleness of being, yet feeling emotions and intimations which seem to signify that he should not be little, he may look to futurity and exclaim, "*I shall be great yonder!*" When feeling how little belongs to him, how diminutive and poor his sphere of possession here, he may say, "The immense futurity is mine! I may be content to be poor awhile in the prospect of that!" If here ob-

scure and even despised, he may reflect, "Well, it is not here that I expect or want to verify my importance." If forcibly admonished of the brevity of life, the thought may arise, "Well, the sooner my entrance upon a life that shall have no end."

It is most gratifying to see the divine revelation connecting the attribute, the condition of *perfection*, on any terms, in any sense, at any future period, with human nature. It would be gratifying if this were but intimated as a mere possibility;—it is most emphatically so, to see it expressed as an assurance—a promise. Think of man, the combination of all defects! Let any conceivable excellence be named, and the very mention of it is, in effect, a reproach to *him*, as not having it, or having it in but a very deficient measure. Whoever does possess the most of any one of them, is deeply lamenting to perceive how partial, how miserably little, the amount is, compared with even far less than perfection. Looking at man, we seem to see a vast collection of little beginnings,—attempts,—failures; like a plantation on a bleak and blasted heath. And the progress in whatever is valuable and noble, whether in individuals or communities, is so miserably difficult and slow. So that "*the perfectibility of man*," in the sense in which that phrase has been employed, stands justly ridiculed as one of the follies of philosophic romance. Then how delightful it is to see revelation itself, pronouncing as possible, and predicting as to come, something "perfect" in the condition of man!

This prediction of something "perfect" to come, relates to *knowledge*. This is somewhat surprising. It seems much more easy to conceive of perfection in another state attained or conferred, in any of what may be called the *moral* attributes, than in *knowledge*, even in any moderate and comparative sense. For instance;—perfect rectitude of the actuating principle, the motives;—perfect reverence of the Supreme Being;—a perfect spirit of obedience;—perfect "charity;" or to say all in one, perfect *holiness*. These are things of a more simple and absolute nature;—qualities to be

rectification of its own constitution and habitude, which we can conceive effected by a single act of the Divine Power. But *knowledge* is not a state of the dispositions of the intelligent being,—not an intrinsic quality of its nature; but an intellectual relation which it has with *other* things, with *any* thing, with *all* things, which can come within the sphere of its apprehension. The scope of this relation has no necessary limit;—but is quite indefinite; and may be amplified through every successive period of duration. All things in the stupendous totality of existence, and even in possibility, are subjects for knowledge. To hear then from the voice of divine truth, a prediction for men, of perfection in knowledge, in any, the most limited, accommodated sense, is very marvellous. It is a sublime prospect, contemplated under the most limited sense of the terms which display it to us.

Let us attempt, for a few moments, to realize to our imagination such a state of knowledge as the Apostle's text would imply.

The lowest point we can take, in the first place, is *the exclusion of error;*—or in other words, that all *opinion* will be *truth*. The intellect must be perfectly rectified in its mode of perception and action; and the objects on which it is employed undeceptively presented to it. So that if the manner of apprehending be *intuition*, the objects will be made clearly self-evident. Or if there be an exercise like reasoning, the evidence will be explicit, and the reasoning process infallible; so that every thing admitted as knowledge shall be absolutely such. It could not but be in the heavenly state, a painful, a melancholy thing, for the spirit, after exulting in the reception of a portion of knowledge, to find out that it had been imposed on and deluded;—to be beset at each progressive stage, with the suspicion that the apparent advance is perhaps to be trodden back again, as just so far wrong. So far then the knowledge will be "perfect," that nothing delusive and erroneous will be included in what is taken for knowledge.

We may conceive its perfection in this sense—that

it will be perfectly adequate to the infallible direction of all the activities of the superior state. Those activities we may well believe to be of vast extent and endless variety. But suppose a knowledge competent to them all ;—an infallible knowledge, *what* to do, and *when*, and by *what means* ;—a perfect knowledge what power the agent has for accomplishing the objects ;—a certain foresight of the result ;—a perfect judgment what is right, what is the best ;—a perfect understanding of what is the Divine Will. So that the whole system of action of the immortal beings shall proceed under a luminous intelligence which permits no doubt, or apprehension, or mistake,or failure.

The knowledge of the inhabitants of the better world will doubtless be perfect in this sense—that they will possess as much of it as is indispensable to their happiness, and will be sensible that they do so. They will not feel that some of the essential means of their felicity are concealed in the shade which lies beyond the great and illuminated field of their vision. They will not be in the condition of the apostle John, who looked on the sealed book, and "wept" because there was none to open it. On the contrary, each one will be able to say, "I am happy in this light,—happy, till the Father of lights shall see good to make me still more so, by opening to me another book yet sealed—to expand still further this wide and glorious vision."

These happy beings will possess always as much knowledge, as for the time their faculties are actually capable of admitting—there will be "no craving void." So that, as to what they cannot then know, it will not be that it is arbitrarily withheld—causing them to say, "If it were but told me—if it were but disclosed, I could understand it." This is our case here,—there doubtless are a vast number of things kept in the dark from us, which we *could* understand if they were but *declared ;* and there is sometimes a most restless wish to know them. That knowledge may be called perfect, which shall be so, relatively to the capacity of the intelligent being. Imagine this, and then imagine a continual sensible enlargement of the capacity itself, and

*as* it enlarges, a continual influx of new knowledge to fill it!

We should take some advantage of the apostle's mode of illustrating, by a contrast between "that which is in part," and that "perfect" which is to come.

We may advert to the imperfect, partial nature of our *means* of knowledge. It is a mysterious thing in the all-wise Creator's economy, that intellectual beings, *spirits*, should be inclosed in gross matter, and made dependent for their action on its organization. The senses contained in this material frame, the grand inlets of our knowledge, must and do convey it in a most imperfect manner. These, while they are the medium of knowledge, yet keep up an insuperable separation between the mind, the spirit, and the objects desired to be known. Through them it can receive only *reports* and *images* of the things. It cannot itself come at the things themselves. How it wishes sometimes that it could! It longs to know what things are in their own reality.

Language again is a most imperfect medium for the conveyance of knowledge;—it is indeed *framed upon* our imperfect knowledge, and partaking of all its defects. It is contrived by men to express what they very imperfectly conceive and know, and is full of indistinctness, uncertainty, perplexity, confusion. But "when that which is perfect is come!"—it may be said, "What then? What will *then* be the mode, the medium, the instruments of our receiving and conveying knowledge?" We cannot even conjecture, till it *do* come,—but it must be something immensely different, whether or not in analogy with the present means.

One almost dislikes to suppose, in that more perfect state, even a resemblance to such feeble things as hearing, seeing, feeling, language. But the sovereign and beneficent Creator, in forming his creature anew in a far nobler condition, will infallibly do it for the best—and if there be to be senses, and any artificial instruments, of knowledge analogous to the present, let them be but as much superior to these as a "spiritual body," made like the glorified body of

Christ, will be superior to this "earthy," mortal one, and it will suffice.

But whatever shall be the means and manner of apprehending,—the apprehension must be incomparably more immediate and intimate than in this world, to satisfy the exalted intelligence. That there will be this pervading intelligence, this intimacy of knowledge, seems to be implied by what the apostle says, "I shall know even as also I am known," that is, by the divine Spirit. So "when that which is in part shall be done away, and that which is perfect is come," the *manner* of knowing shall be an entire, a complete one, as to the means and instruments.—Here note the imperfection of the other great mean of knowledge, *reasoning*.

How emphatically our present knowledge is but "in part," if we advert to the number and extent of the things to be known. It is but a diminutive portion of the grand whole of things, that we can even be so apprised of as to be aware that we are ignorant of them. We can think no question at all about them. But take even so much as we are apprised of enough to make subjects of inquiry; and just think, how many can be answered of all the questions we can ask? To a vast proportion of them there is no possible answer at all. To a great majority of the rest, that do not go entirely beyond our sphere, the answer is extremely doubtful. As to the comparatively few that we seem to think we can reply to, we find, when we try, that the answer is that of but a very partial knowledge.

"When that which is perfect is come," it will not bring an answer to all possible inquiries;—*that* were to extend our knowledge beyond an archangel's compass; but it may well be believed that it will be amazing and delightful to see what a multitude of things, of which we had but the faintest glimpses before, are brought into perfect manifestation. What a revelation there may be in two senses;—in the vast enlargement of the mind's own proper *power* of knowing, while it looks from a higher eminence over a wider

field;—and in the direct disclosures and communications which the Divine Being may beneficently make. His present revelation is the greatest blessing conferred on human intelligence on earth. But how obviously *that* is but "in part." How many things are not mentioned!—how many with but a particle of information!—some are presented with an obscure and half-revealed aspect, like the moon sometimes seen with a narrow line of light, and the disc opaque and dimly perceptible. It would not be a wild imagination, that then there will be a still further new revelation, strictly such, to impart information of what will still be beyond the sphere of knowledge by any other means—and *that* also to become ultimately an immediate knowledge; and then a still further and further revelation; and so forward, interminably and for ever!

But all these anticipations remind us but the more forcibly, how we here "know but in part." *So* "in part," that just *the* part, the portion which we want to attain, is divided off from our reach. It seems as if a dissevering principle, or a dark veil, fell down exactly at the point where we think we are near upon the knowledge we are pursuing. We reach the *essential* question of the inquiry;—let that be surpassed and we should arrive at the truth—exult in the knowledge. But just there we are stopped by something insuperable; and there we stand, like prisoners looking at their impregnable wall.

*So* "in part" our knowledge is, that an exceeding weight, we sometimes feel as if a disproportionate one, is thrown upon our *faith*. We cannot understand the case, and yet we must approvingly submit to Him who is the Master of all things; and our obedience must be as ready and unreserved as if we could. But this is a hard exercise for faith. In our partial view, appearances may seem against what we nevertheless are required most firmly to believe. It is difficult to maintain this faith, but is happily aided by the divine assurance, that one day we shall know "when that which is perfect is come."

*So* "in part" our knowledge is, that in many things we see far more of the evil than of the good, in the whole state of things, as far as within our comprehension. But we are sure that on the great view, to which we cannot yet attain, there *must* be a decided predominance of good, in the empire of Him who is infinite in wisdom, power, and goodness. The anticipation of clearly seeing it so, is a delightful radiance from heaven on our present dark abode.

*So* "in part," our knowledge is, that we cannot agree one with another. The "part" itself is not clear, bright, and infallible, as far as it goes. It contains those shades, perplexities, and equivocal appearances, among which men *must* greatly differ. It would have been a fine thing if good men, and wise men, could have been unanimous on to the limited extent of this early stage and immaturity of our knowledge, and had not filled the twilight of the great approaching day of wisdom with their controversies and their quarrels. But when the "perfect comes," the grand illumination of each spirit will be rendered inconceivably more delightful by the coincidence of judgment which will create a happy sympathy and harmony of the affections.

These general ideas might be illustrated in application to our imperfect knowledge of even our own nature, as in the essential principle of life;—the mysterious connexion of the soul with the body;—the nature and operations of that soul itself. How striking to reflect, that we can as yet just as much comprehend the whole universe as our own little selves, our own selves who are thinking and talking on these subjects. These ideas might also be viewed in their application to the theory of the condition and destination of our race;—the system of divine Providence;—the doctrines of religion;—the manner of our future existence;—the inquiry, what rational beings, and under what economy, in other realms of the universe; and the universe itself.

After such views contemplated, think of the pride

of present knowledge! with a little glimmering on their spirits, there are men that walk the earth with an elation as if they should be gods;—and destitute too, as this very pride would show, of that which is the best of the knowledge attainable here!

Consider what a high advantage over us is now attained by our pious friends that are gone—even in that less perfect state which intervenes between the departure hence and the resurrection!

"Then that which is in part shall be done away." Imagine the emerging from this dark world into light! what a dismissal from our spirits, what a vanishing away of the whole systems of our little notions, our childish conceptions! If they will be sufficiently recollected to be compared with the grand manifestation of truth and reality then unveiled, what a contrast! Yet there will not be an entire contempt thrown upon the retrospect; for it will be understood how those little notions, that feeble light, that partial revelation, were the right training for the infancy and childhood of the human soul.

Let us then be thankful that we *do* know, though but in part, and earnestly apply and improve what we are permitted to know. Let us be thankful, too, that one point of that very knowledge is, that its imperfection will be left behind.

If there will be, as none can doubt, in the heavenly state, different degrees in the felicity of the redeemed spirits, and if knowledge will be one great mean of felicity there, *who* may be expected to possess the highest attainments of it? Not necessarily those, even good men, who possessed the most of it here, but rather those who have excelled the most in *piety*,—in devotion to God and Christ, and the cause of heaven in this world. God *can*, by one great act of his rewarding power, make *them* the highest in *intelligence*, and it is reasonable to believe that he *will*.

## XXVI.

### END OF THE YEAR.

"*We spend our years as a tale that is told.*"—The ninetieth psalm being ascribed to Moses, its pensive strain may be deemed to have a particular reference to the condition of the Israelites in the sojourn in the wilderness, under the doom of consuming away their lives there. Nevertheless, this pensive strain is in harmony with the sentiments of the most thoughtful persons ever since. No part of the ancient scriptures is less obsolete than this. It is a picture still true to nature. Human life, viewed generally, has not since brightened up into a scene of joy and triumph. The brief description of the state in paradise belongs to a departed and remote economy; and that given in this psalm is instantly felt to be appropriate to the present condition of man. This representation applies itself and fastens close upon the real subject. The beautiful and splendid images brought from the beginning of our history, or shaped since by fine imagination, stand off into the air, from the reality; a fair vision, but no more attached to the actual substance than the beautiful clouds or the rainbow will descend or permanently rest on the surface of the ground.

One circumstance of the description is,—"We spend our years as a tale that is told." This seems to express both a necessary fact, and a censure. The rapid consumption of our years,—their speedy passing away, is inevitable. But they may be spent also in a trifling manner, to little valuable purpose, which would complete the disconsolate reflection on them, by the addition of guilt and censure.

We have been consuming our years; we have very nearly expended another;—think how nearly it is gone from us! Yonder as it were behind is the long lapse of it. As if we stood by a stream bearing various things upon it away. We can look back to its successive times and incidents, as what we *were* present to. But Omnipotence cannot take us back to meet

again its commencement, or any portion or circumstance of it. We are present now to one of its latest diminutive portions, which Omnipotence cannot withhold from following the departed. We are occupying it, breathing in it, thinking in it, for nearly the last time; little more of it is remaining than time enough for bidding it a solemn and reflective *farewell!* A few hours more, and the year can never be of the smallest further use to us, except in the way of *reflection.* It is a serious thing to say *that* of any valuable thing included in our portion on earth;—a thing that antecedently was of great direct value,—value for actual use,—now of none but for thought. For there is a great difference between the possible good from a valuable thing in possession, or that is to be in possession,—and the good that afterwards might be gained by merely thinking of it when it is gone. Suppose the case of a considerable amount of property that *was* possessed, or in a man's power, but is so no longer,—spent,—perhaps wasted or lost. Now, a man who can *think* wisely may derive *some* good from it even after it is gone. But how different his situation from that of *having* it in his power, and with wisdom to use it well. So in the case of having lost by death, a highly valuable and useful friend. Apply this to our case with respect to the departed year.

In having had this whole year, we have had more of valuable time, than we had any right, at the beginning of it, to assure ourselves of. All that we could say the beginning was—"Such and such things may be effected for ourselves—for others,—for God,—IF our lives are prolonged." But we did not *know* that we should have so much riches of time to spend. The event has proved that we were to have the whole year, with all those possibilities of good.

We may yet gain some good from the past year, by wise reflection. But there is a vast difference between the measure of any good that can now *so* be gained,—and the measure of that good which was possible to be gained during the possessions and expenditure of the year. Place yourselves in thought

back at the beginning of it, and remember that there you actually did stand,—that it was no imaginary point of history. *Then* you might, say, "What is possible to me in the whole length of this commencing year, if the Divine Will shall prolong my life throughout it, in moderate health?—what is possible in a space of nearly four hundred days? My ordinary worldly business and cares absolutely must fill a main share of the time. But even in *this*, by aid from above, there *may* be perhaps a purer conscience maintained, and a more habitual sense of the divine presence. There *may* be, in almost four hundred days, a vast number of—most serious thoughts—pointed reflections of self-examination, and self-judgment,—distinct references to God and eternity,—earnest desires after an assured and unquestionable interest in Jesus Christ,—petitions deliberately conceived and addressed to the Almighty,—efforts at a clearer apprehension of divine truth,—efforts to recall and reapply important admonitions,—efforts for practical self-correction,—efforts to make something that we think, or that we can do, useful to fellow-mortals." Compute now the sum of all these invaluable things,—if effected, what a happy enrichment of our spirits and our life! What a value at the time, and forward through life, and into eternity! Now when the year began, all this was possible. The coming year contained all these possibilities; like a mine in which it is certain there is a mass of precious treasure, which may be dug for, and will be found, if the labour is applied; like a field of great and certain fertility. The circumstance that we were not sure of the whole year, made only this difference, that the duty was still the more urgent to improve it, *part by part*, as it might be given to us. Why should not all this that was possible, have been realized? Reflections on the then past year enforced an earnest endeavour, regret, and perhaps remorse came in to reinforce it. Time was evidently acquiring an aggravated value and importance in our hands by diminution. We had perhaps known of unhappy

instances of that being the last year to persons who had failed of making the wisest use of their former ones. There were perhaps brought to our view, the most grave and forcible considerations applicable to the case, and corresponding resolutions were most deliberately formed. Then, IF we have failed greatly, WHY have we failed? It were desirable the cause should be well understood.

*One* of the points, if there was a neglect of *that*, may account for a failure in all the rest;—constant earnest petitioning for divine influence and assistance. For the instruction supplied by all our years has been to little purpose, if we are not become fully aware of one plain fact, that which was expressed in our Lord's sentence—"Without ME ye can do nothing." In other words, that it is only through the medium of God that we can effectually attempt any of the most important things, because we have a nature that is unadapted to them—repugnant to them,—revolts from them. Recollect such things as we were naming as what might have been in the past year. Could the impulse of these intentions,—these aims,—these attempts, be effective by the mere force of the soul itself? No, the case would be like that of the man who stretched out his hand to a sacred object, "and behold it was withered!" Or as if some implement requiring to be kept in a high temperature for some critical operation, were held forth to be applied, but became frozen in this winter atmosphere. But it is from the heart that the frost proceeds! O! that fatal source and cause of disability and failure! It is therefore only through an agency, and, shall we say, an element of divinity, pervading and surrounding us, that we can reach forth with an effectual effort. Therefore, if during the past year we failed in the essential point of imploring that Divine Spirit to animate us,—well might we fail in the rest!

But we will not assume so gloomy a fact as that the case has been wholly thus. It is the concern of each one's conscience; but we will hope that in

more than a few instances, some good measure has been effected of what was the grand purpose for which the departed year was given. Whoever be the persons of whom this is true in the greatest degree, they are the happiest that the year has left alive, —supremely happy in this, that they do not need the year that is coming on. How happy! as compared with what the thoughtless or the worldly may envy the most. There are men who have within the past year come into possession of great wealth. They will want another year! Ask them whether it be so or not? There are men who have brought a great worldly scheme to a point of signal success; who have come back in safety and triumph from a long and hazardous adventure. There are men who have reached the arduous summit of intellectual attainment and honour. But show us the man for whom, *as a Christian*, the past year has done the most! and then, if he might take all these fine things *instead*,— let a sober voice, let any voice say, whether he should! if he could and did, what should he do with them, if within a few months hence he were summoned to die? and *then* what should he do without the things he would have surrendered in exchange?

But however the case has really been with us, we return to the observation, that the year has now gone beyond our making any advantage of it, except in the way of reflection. It is like a seed-time gone, and the tract of ground sunk under the sea. It is as a treasure-house burnt; but of which, nevertheless, we may find some little of the gold melted into a different form in the ashes. Let us then, in parting with the year, try to gain from it the last and only thing it can give us,—some profit by means of our thoughts reaching back to what is gone. Each serious mind will have its own kind of reflections.

Sentiments of a grateful kind should be among the first to arise in every one's meditation on the past year. It should be so if the fact be, that in the whole year there has not been an hour—a moment, in which

we did not owe gratitude. What then must be the sum? There *has* been an exercise in the most perfect sense, *incessant*, of a beneficent Providence, maintained, while an infinity of things have been in operation, and among them a legion of evils. Think a moment what *might* have been! A tremendous vision of possible evils arises at the thought! Think, too, what can we say that we could claim by desert from the righteous Governor of the world! Then think where we are left, in point of obligation, at the close of the year! and whether we are fit to enter on another year without gratitude! If we have no right estimate and feeling for the past mercies of God, how are we to receive present and future ones with a right feeling? For future duty we shall want to have motives; think, if all the force that should be motive could be drawn in the form of gratitude, from one year's mercies of God, and as it were converged to a point, what a potent motive that would be! We have to look back over the year to collect this force—and not to do so, is to forego one of the benefits which might be derived from it even after it is gone.

Our last year has been added to an irrevocable account. It has passed into the record of heaven,—into the memory of God! The seal of eternity has been put upon it; so that it stands irreversible for ever;—stands an unalterable portion of our everlasting existence. The awful force of this consideration comes peculiarly upon the moments and feelings when we could wish some parts of it altered. Think with what force it would come if it were under a mere economy of divine *justice*. But then, what a glorious appointment of the divine *mercy* is that which can reverse the effect—the actual consequence, of the guilty portion of the past year;—reverse it as to the appropriate and deserved retribution. But this doctrine of mercy must not be abused, and therefore,—another thing in our review of the past year should be to observe what there has been in it which ought not to be in another. Let a careful and even severe account be taken of those things; and then say whether it be not

enough that the past year bears on its character such things for ever. Let them be strongly marked as what ought not to pass the dividing line between this year and the next; and let them be earnestly opposed when they shall come to do so. Would that an angel, as with a flaming sword, might stand on the border to repel them! The Almighty Spirit can do this for us.

What would have been our situation, if the whole of the year had *not* been given us? Would less have sufficed us as to the supreme purpose of life? Can we go back in thought, to points and periods of it and say,—there, in its earlier months,—or there, at the middle, *our* time might have closed, and all would have been well? or if near the end, or yesterday, or to-day, our time had closed, all had been well? But if there be not ground for a humble confidence that all would have been well, the year closes *ill*. Can there be a mightier admonition for the commencement of another year?

Our year has been *parallel* to that of those persons who have made the noblest use of it. We can represent to ourselves the course of the most devoted servants of God through this past year, in various states, and modes of employment. Now *we* had just the same hours, days, and months, as *they*. Let the comparison be made. Why was the day, the week, the month, of less value in our hands than in theirs? Do we stand for ever dissociated from them upon this year? How desirable that we may be associated with them during the next, if God prolong our life!

Our further experience of mortal life, and the world. We have seen it,—tried it,—judged it, thus much longer. Has the estimate brightened upon us by experience? Have we obtained a practical refutation of the sacred oracles that have pronounced "*Vanity*" upon it? Now the results of experience should really stand for something in our views of this mortal state,—and in the degree of our attachment to it. Besides, what should be the effect of this further knowledge of the nature and quality of this mortal state? There should be some effect from the mere circumstance of

one year's diminution of our occupancy of this state. Our interest upon it is contracted to so much narrower a breadth. At first we may be said to have had vital ties to the whole extent of this mortal life;—an interest in each portion of it as it was coming to be ours. We held to life by each year of the whole allotment. But each year withdrawn cut that tie, like the cutting in succession of each of the spreading roots of a tree. The consumption of this last year has cut away another of these holds on life, these ties of connexion and interest. Now there should in spirit and feeling be a degree of detachment in proportion.

In whatever way we consider the subtraction of one year from our whole allotment, it is an important circumstance. It reduces to a narrower space the uncertainty of life's continuance. At the beginning we might, for any thing that could be known, live but one or a few years;—yet we *might* live fifty, sixty, or seventy years. But now, as to many of us, there is no such wide range of life. It brings us nearer to see what we are likely to be *at* the end and *after* the end! It has increased the religious danger, if there be danger. It tells us of too much that now can never be done. It has added very greatly to the weight of every consideration that ought to impel us to make the utmost of what may remain.

The year departed may admonish us of the strange deceptiveness. the stealthiness of the flight of time. There have been a prodigious number of minutes and hours to look forward to, and each hour at the time did not seem to go so wonderfully fast; and yet how short a while they now seem to have been, in all vanishing away! It will be so in what is to come. Each day will beguile us with this deception, if we are not vigilant; and will leave us, still to be done, that which it should have done. Therefore every period and portion of it,—the ensuing year, and each part of it,—should be entered on with emphatically imploring our God to save us from spending it in vain!

THE END.